A Review of Don Bosco's Stages of Life:

Imitating His Exemplar Facing Life Contingencies in Response to the Divine Will

Ho Ka Fai

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Author: Ho KA FAI
Publisher: Ho KA FAI
Address: 18, Estrada da Vitoria, Macau, China.
The Date of Publication: September, 2025.
Edition: The First Edition.
Printing Company: Artist's Printing Co., Macau, China.
September, 2025, First Printing.
The Number of Printing: 100
(Not for Sale)

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Nihil Obstat:
Rev. Cyril Jerome Law, Jr., Chancellor, Macau Diocese.
Imprimatur:
Dom Stephen Lee Bun-sang, Bishop of Macau.

ISBN 978-99981-60-68-2

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Preface

I was greatly honoured when Fr. Ho asked me to write the preface for his book which is entitled *A review of Don Bosco's Stages of Life: Imitating His Exemplary Face in Life's Contingencies in Response to Divine Will*. As we can see from the contents of the book, in order to emphasize Don Bosco's lifelong commitment to serving God's will no matter how trying the circumstances, Fr. Ho breaks the tradition of purely theological analysis of the different stages of Don Bosco's life. Instead, he rigorously analyzing the different stages of Don Bosco's life by applying the methodology of spiritual theology which is associated with the psychological development theory of Erick Erickson. According to this theory people at different developmental stages need one another both for their personal growth and spiritual growth.

We know that Don Bosco received God's instructions in his dreams to educate destitute youth. As one can imagnate how difficult this ask would be yet Don Bosco accomplished. This clearly was Don Bosco's charism, a charism ispired and brought to completion by God. At the same time, this charism was moulded also by the the family religious education of his mother and the teaching and spiritual guidance of the holy and examplary priests that Don Bosco encountered. This is exactly what Fr. Ho wanted to highlight through his reserach: people at different stages of developmental in life need both God's calling and a faithful response to God. At the same time, they need one another both for their personal growth and spiritual growth. And the centrality of this interaction between God's call and man's response is Jesus. Christ.

In sum, I really appreciate the daring and determination of Fr. Ho. Firstly, Fr. Ho uncovers the motivations of the examplary of Salesian by analyzing Don Bosco's entire life: from his childhood to his elderhood. Secondly, since Fr. Ho's back ground is psychology he seamlessly combines the unrelated fields of theology and psychology into a single scholarly and rigorous whole. I am sure that this book will remain a groundbreaking piece of scholarship which will have furthered the bounds of knowledge. Thirdly, as Pope Benedict XVI has mentioned many times the greatest problem with the people today is their lack of the sense of sacred, the sense of the spiritual. People today have no verticle transcendence. They have only horizontal materialism. Consequently, God has no place in their lives: God is marginalized.

Therefore this book of Fr. Ho is of great aid to our present sad situation because it describes how God still communicates with us in our time by giving us an example from the 19th century. God chooses to tell certain people what He wants them to do. This experience stands not only in stark contrast to today's world of materialism and individualism, this is also an important lesson for today's people as well.

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University of Saint Joseph, Macau
19 December 2024
Feast day of Pope St. Anastasius I

Abbreviations used in the notes

BM Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*. Edited by Diego Borgatello. Vol. 1-9. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-1975.

Eugenio Ceria. *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*. Edited by Diego Borgatello. Vol. 11-19. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964-2003.

References are by volume and page.

C *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*. Roma: S.D.B., 1984.

References are by code number.

DBLW Pietro Stella. *Don Bosco: Life and Work.* Translated by John Drury. New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 2005.

DBHS Arthur J Lenti. *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*. Edited by Aldo Giraudo. Vol. 1-7. Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2007-2010.

References are by volume and page.

MO John Bosco. *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis De Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*. Translated by Daniel Lyons. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989.

R *General Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales*. Roma: S.D.B., 1984.

References are by code number.

Biblical Abbreviations

Old Testament

Genesis	Gn	Nehemiah	Ne	Baruch	Ba
Exodus	Ex	Tobit	Tb	Ezekiel	Ezk
Leviticus	Lv	Judith	Jdt	Daniel	Dn
Numbers	Nb	Esther	Est	Hosea	Ho
Deuteronomy	Dt	1 Maccabees	1 M	Joel	Jl
Joshua	Jos	2 Maccabees	2 M	Amos	Am
Judges	Jg	Job	Jb	Obadiah	Ob
Ruth	Rt	Psalms	Ps	Jonah	Jon
1 Samuel	1 S	Proverbs	Pr	Micah	Mi
2 Samuel	2 S	Ecclesiastes	Ec	Nahum	Na
1 Kings	1 K	Song of Songs	Sg	Habakkuk	Hab
2 Kings	2 K	Wisdom	Ws	Zephaniah	Zp
1 Chronicles	1 Ch	Sirach	Si	Haggai	Hg
2 Chronicles	2 Ch	Isaiah	Is	Malachi	Ml
Ezra	Ezr	Jeremiah	Jr	Zechariah	Zc
		Lamentations	Lm		

New Testament

Matthew	Mt	Ephesians	Eph	Hebrews	Heb
Mark	Mk	Philippians	Ph	James	Jm
Luke	Lk	Colossians	Col	1 Peter	1 P
John	Jn	1 Thessalonians	1 Th	2 Peter	2 P
Acts	Ac	2 Thessalonians	2 Th	1 John	1 Jn
Romans	Rm	1 Timothy	1 Tm	2 John	2 Jn
1 Corinthians	1 Cor	2 Timothy	2 Tm	3 John	3 Jn
2 Corinthians	2 Cor	Titus	Tt	Jude	Jude
Galatians	Gal	Philemon	Phm	Revelation	Rv

1. Introduction

1.1 Don Bosco's Life and Works

St. John Bosco (1815–1888) was a Catholic priest in Turin, in northern Italy. His full name was John Melchior Bosco. He was the son of Francis Louis and Margaret Occhiena Bosco, who were farmers in Becchi at the farm of Biglione.[1]

From 1841 to 1844, Don Bosco pursued advanced studies in priestly education at the Pastoral Institute (Convitto) in Turin.[2] During a pastoral visit to a prison, he experienced a deeply moving encounter with a large group of youths aged 12 to 18 who had returned to prison just days after their release. These young people seemed completely abandoned by society. Reflecting on this, Don Bosco remarked:

> If these youngsters had a friend on the outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who returned to prison could be lessened.[3]

This experience inspired him to establish a festive oratory in 1841 to meet the needs of young seasonal workers from the countryside.[4] This initiative is widely regarded as the beginning of Don Bosco's charism and spirituality, deeply rooted in serving society's most vulnerable members.

To build upon his pastoral work, Don Bosco founded the Salesian Society, officially approved by Pope Blessed Pius IX in 1869.[5] Additionally, he established the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) in 1872 and the Association

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[1] DBHS, vol. 1, 38.

[2] MO, 180-182.

[3] *Ibid.*, 182.

[4] DBLW, 114.

[5] MO, 442.

of Salesian Cooperators in 1876.[6] The mission of St. John Bosco and the societies he founded has always been to serve youth, particularly the poor and marginalized. Dedicated to the virtues of patience and gentleness,[7] the Salesian Society was placed under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales. Its motto, *"Da Mihi Animas, Caetera Tolle"* ("Give me souls, take away the rest"), captures its spirit and mission.[8]

Through the Salesian Society, Don Bosco promoted and implemented an effective preventive system of education, based on his pastoral experiences. He outlined this system in his booklet *Regolamento per le case della Societa de S. Francesco di Sales*, which provides a detailed explanation of the preventive approach to education tailored to the needs of young people.[9]

The culmination of Don Bosco's life and works led to his canonization on April 1, 1934.[10] In 1989, Pope St. John Paul II declared and proclaimed him the "Father and Teacher of Youth."[11]

1.2 Methodology

In this study, Don Bosco's life stages are analyzed using a methodology grounded in spiritual theology and Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory.[12]

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*, 217.

[8] BM, vol. 5, 81.

[9] Pietro Braido, "Prevention Not Repression, Don Bosco's Educational System," Salesians Don Bosco, 2021, accessed 12 October 2021. https://www.sdb.org/en/Educational_System/Preventive_System/Documents/Prevention_not_Repression__Don_Bosco__s_Educational_System_b.

[10] Salesians Don Bosco, "The Young People's Priest," Salesians Don Bosco, 2021, accessed 28 September 2021, https://www.sdb.org/en/Don_Bosco/Don_Bosco/The_Priest_of_Young_People.

[11] John Paul II, "Lettera a Don Egidio Viganò, Rettore Maggiore Della Società Salesiana Di San Giovanni Bosco (24 Gennaio 1989): Giovanni Paolo II," The Holy See, January 23, 1989, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1989/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19890124_vigano.html.

[12] Erik Erikson (1902-1994) was born in Frankfurt, Germany. He was an artist and a teacher in the late 1920's. He faced his own identity crisis at an early age. After he met Anna Freud, an Austrian psychoanalyst (and with her encouragement), Erikson began to study child psychoanalysis at the Vienna

This dual approach allows us to explore how Don Bosco exemplified a life of faith while addressing life's challenges in alignment with Divine will.

1.2.1 A Study in Spiritual Theology

Spiritual theology is a discipline that involves theological reflection based on Sacred Scripture and Tradition. It examines on the spiritual writings and teachings of saints, draws insight from Christian experiences recognized by the Church as exemplary for the faithful, and offers rational elaborations of Divine Revelation.[13] Don Bosco provides a particularly suitable case for such a study, as his life represents an authentic and practical example of Christian experience.

Spiritual theology examines the organic structure of spiritual life, which includes God's grace, the practice of virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[14] This structure highlights the cooperative relationship between human freedom and God's grace as individuals strive toward spiritual perfection.[15] As stated in the Gospel of Matthew: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

The spiritual journey begins with God, who inspires individuals to seek perfection.[16] This journey involves nurturing relationships with oneself, others, the world, and, ultimately, with God. Faith serves as the guiding principle for integrating

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Psychoanalytic Institute. He later immigrated to the United States in 1933 and taught at Yale and Harvard Universities.

It was at this point in his life that he became interested in the influence of society and culture on child development. To satisfy his curiosity, he studied groups of American Indian children to help to formulate his theories. Studying these children enabled him to correlate personality growth with parental and societal values.

[13] Ernst Burkhart and Javier López, *Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaría*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2017), xviii.

[14] René Latourelle, *Theology: Science of Salvation*, trans. Mary Dominic (New York: St Paul Publications, 1969), 147.

[15] *Ibid*., 147-148. Spiritual perfection means in a general way a certain fullness of the spiritual life which lacks nothing for its complete development in this world or in the next.

[16] Joseph de Guibert, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Paul Barrett (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 115.

these relationships into a holistic spiritual life.[17] The Holy Spirit further empowers believers to pursue holiness, aiding them in the process of sanctification.[18] This is consistent with the teaching found in the Gospel of John: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

The ultimate goal of spiritual theology is to understand how individuals, encouraged by Divine grace, strive for spiritual perfection. This study examines Don Bosco's life stages through the lens of Divine guidance and human response, focusing on his unwavering faith and commitment to sanctity. Spiritual perfection is not limited to individuals but extends to communities, highlighting the importance of mutual support in achieving human, social, and spiritual goals.[19] This calls for us to support one another in the pursuit of these dimensions of perfection.[20] Charity, in both its affective and effective forms, plays a vital role in this process and is central to Christian perfection.[21]

In summary, a study in spiritual theology seeks to examine how individuals, guided by Divine grace and motivated by faith, pursue spiritual perfection.[22] It is clear that God initiates this process, followed by the individual's free cooperation and faith response in striving for perfection.[23] In this book, Don Bosco's life stages serve

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[17] Mary Milligan, "Christian Spirituality," in *The College Student's Introduction to Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017), 163-164.

[18] De Guibert, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, 111 & 114.

[19] *Ibid.*, 39.

[20] *Ibid.*, 44.

[21] *Ibid.*, 52. Affective charity means that we love God and love what He loves. This is uniting us to the Goodness of God. Effective charity means that we serve God and do what He commands. This makes us act in accordance with His will.

[22] *Ibid.*, 11.

[23] *Ibid.*, 151-153. See also *Summa Theologiae* Ia IIæ, q.113, art.8: "In this natural order, the infusion of grace comes first; next the movement of free choice directed towards God; third the movement of free choice directed at sin; and fourth the forgiveness of sin."

as a compelling model for exploring the dynamic relationship between God's call and human response.

This study also considers the concepts of "guidance" and "motivation" within the relationship between God's call and human faith response. Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter[24] emphasizes that human action must encompass both "imposition" and "motivation."[25] For instance, the habit of personal prayer and the cultivation of virtues cannot be achieved through 'imposition' alone but must also involve "motivation." When forming habits, these two factors must be considered together as a benchmark for shaping external conduct. Additionally, "imposition" and "motivation" must be evaluated in terms of life values to properly form well-motivated actions.[26] Inspired by Cardinal Carter, the author chooses to use the term "guidance" rather than "imposition," as the latter implies coercion in accepting beliefs or ways of living.[27] This substitution emphasizes the dynamic relationship between God's call and the human faith response.

The story of Moses in the Book of Exodus provides an illustrative example. Despite Moses's initial reluctance, God offered him guidance and motivation through reassurances and signs: "But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve

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[24] G. Emmett Carter was born in Montreal on March 1, 1912. He received his theological education at the Grand Seminary of Montreal and he was ordained on May 22, 1937. He was appointed Archbishop of the See of Toronto on April 27, 1978. One year later, on June 30, Pope John Paul II elevated Archbishop Carter to the Sacred College of Cardinals. Cardinal Carter contributed significantly to the Catholic community by seeking to improve race relations, founding Covenant House for street youth under 21, fighting against abortion, and protecting the rights of Catholics. On December 20, 1982, Cardinal Carter was named a Companion of the Order of Canada, the top honour of the Order reserved for Canadians demonstrating the highest degree of merit to their country and humanity. Cardinal Carter's resignation as Archbishop was accepted by the Pope and was announced on March 17, 1990. He passed away on April 6, 2003.

[25] G. Emmett Carter, *Psychology and the Cross* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2022), 100.

[26] *Ibid.*, 102.

[27] "The meaning of Impose in English," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed September 6, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/impose.

God upon this mountain" (Ex 3:12). This interaction demonstrates how God combines guidance with motivation to inspire humanity's pursuit of spiritual goals. This theme is echoed in the Letter of St. James, which emphasizes that faith and works must go hand in hand (Jm 4:24–26).[28] By placing Jesus Christ at the center of this relationship—referred to as Christocentrism[29]—we acknowledge that "there is salvation in no one else" (Ac 4:12).

1.2.2 A Study in Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory is utilized to complement the theological framework, providing psychological insights into Don Bosco's life stages. There are five key reasons for choosing Erikson's theory for this study:

First, Erikson emphasizes the significance of a healthy individual in his developmental theory, asserting that only a healthy, integrated person can reveal the true essence of humanity. He also notes that Christianity enriches this understanding by adding "spirit" to men and "soulfulness" to women. Consequently, a healthy individual focuses on human potential, encompassing both the development of virtues and spiritual growth.[30] This perspective resonates with the teachings in St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which affirms that good precedes evil and that humans are created fundamentally good, destined to grow into the fullness of Christ.[31]

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[28] You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead (Jm 4:24-26).

[29] Joseph Ratzinger [Benedict XVI, Pope], *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 53. Christocentrism indicates that humanity is assumed by the Son of God is in all its mysteries, from the incarnation to the ascension into heaven, efficacious for the salvation of humankind and for the radical renewal of creation. Christ is therefore the only Redeemer and absolute exemplar.

[30] Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant, and Dennis Linn, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994), 14. See also, Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964), 175.

[31] "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through

Second, Erikson believes that development missed earlier can be made up later, which means that anything in human psychic development can be healed.[32] In terms of spirituality, there is nothing that Jesus Christ cannot heal. Erikson's emphasis aligns with the teaching in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Mt 19:26)."

Third, Erikson highlights the psychosocial perspective of human development, which refers to the movement of individuals toward mature social relationships. In this view, the community plays an integral role in the healing process.[33] This concept closely aligns with the teaching found in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1Cor 12:12-14).

God can heal individuals through various channels within the community, such as parents, teachers, friends, and others.

Fourth, Erikson views growth as a lifelong process, offering continuous opportunities to discover gifts for love. This perspective parallels the Christian understanding of how the Holy Spirit constantly renews the faithful and leads them to fuller lives,[34] as the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. Erikson's viewpoint aligns with the teaching in the Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians:

> We may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with

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his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen (Eph 3:14-21)."

[32] Linn, et al., *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 15.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] *Ibid*.

> every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Eph 4:14-16).

Fifth, Erikson's theory emphasizes the importance of finding a healthy balance when responding to the strengths and weaknesses of each stage of development, rather than choosing in black-and-white terms.[35] This kind of healthy balance encourages people to grow, just as Jesus Christ "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man (Lk 2:52)."

Considering the five reasons mentioned above, we may assert that Erikson's theory is appropriately applied to examine Don Bosco's stages of life. Erikson emphasized that, at each stage, biological, psychological, and social factors influence human growth. The specific conflict encountered or addressed in each stage is closely tied to psychological needs and the surrounding social environment. When successfully resolved, fundamental human virtues are nurtured, helping to address current challenges and forming a foundation for subsequent developmental stages. These resolutions also affect relationships with the environment and the long-term impact of childhood cognitive and social development. Conversely, unresolved crises at a given stage may leave a child vulnerable and maladjusted. In essence, a child's growth consists of a series of challenges that prepare them to move forward in life and develop their potential for social interaction.[36]

Furthermore, Erikson's theory comprises six basic concepts: (1) stages of development, (2) developmental tasks, (3) psychosocial crises, (4) central processes for resolving crises at each stage, (5) networks of significant relationships, and (6)

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[35] Linn, et al., *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 16.

[36] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 91-96.

coping—the process through which individuals generate new behaviors to address new challenges.[37] Based on these six basic concepts from Erikson's theory, this study condenses them into three key elements to analyze each stage of Don Bosco's life: social context, significant individuals, and the virtues of personal development.

To apply Erikson's eight stages of lifespan development,[38] this study reviews each stage of Don Bosco's life within the framework of the spiritual theology outlined above. This approach examines the issues of guidance and motivation in the interaction between God's call and Don Bosco's faith response, with Christ at the center. The goal is to learn from Don Bosco's exemplary approach to facing life's contingencies in faith.

It is our hope that through this investigation, we can experience what the two disciples described on their journey to Emmaus when they encountered our Lord Jesus Christ, as recounted in the Gospel of St. Luke: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Lk 24:32). With the charism of Don Bosco, may the study of his stages of life inspire our hearts to burn with faith and lead us to follow God's call.

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[37] Barbara M. Newman and Philip R. Newman, *Development through Life: A Psychosocial Approach* (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 63.

[38] Stage 1 (age 0-2), psychosocial crisis: trust vs mistrust, basic virtue: hope.
Stage 2 (age 2-3), psychosocial crisis: autonomy vs shame, basic virtue: will.
Stage 3 (age 3-5), psychosocial crisis: initiative vs guilt, basic virtue: purpose.
Stage 4 (age 5-12), psychosocial crisis: industry vs inferiority, basic virtue: competency.
Stage 5 (age 12-18), psychosocial crisis: identity vs role confusion, basic virtue: fidelity.
Stage 6 (age 18-40), psychosocial crisis: intimacy vs isolation, basic virtue: love.
Stage 7 (age 40-65), psychosocial crisis: generativity vs stagnation, basic virtue: care.
Stage 8 (age 65+), psychosocial crisis: integrity vs despair, basic virtue: wisdom.

2. Don Bosco's Infancy Stage (first 24 months)

St. John Bosco was born in Becchi, in the north of Italy, on August 16, 1815.[38] At the time of his birth, his grandmother, parents, and two elder brothers lived together,[39] working as farmers on their farm of Biglione.[40]

According to Erik Erikson's theory, a sense of basic trust is the focus during this stage of development, along with the cultivation of two basic virtues: drive and hope.[41] Basic trust is nurtured through appropriate parental love and care, particularly the quality of the maternal relationship.[42] This trust fosters a sense of identity and confidence in life, rooted in the caring bond between parents and infants. Moreover, this relationship may nurture an early religious sense in the child.[43]

To analyze every psychosocial stage of Don Bosco's development, we consider the surrounding social context, the significant persons in his life, and the virtues of his personal growth, as outlined in Chapter 1.

2.1 The Social Context regarding the Birthplace of Don Bosco

In the 19th century, sharecropping was a common practice in Piedmont, where the Biglione farm was situated. This arrangement involved a tenant farmer managing land owned by an absentee landlord. Don Bosco's father, Francis Bosco, worked as a tenant farmer and sharecropper on the farm of Biglione in the Morialdo-Becchi area.

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[38] DBHS, vol. 1, 39. 15 August 1815, the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, was acknowledged by Don Bosco as his birthday, however, the real date of his birth in the baptismal record in St. Andrew parish church of Castelnuovo was found in 1889, which was 16 August 1815.

[39] *Ibid.*, 38-39. Margaret Zucca was Don Bosco's grandmother. Anthony Joseph was the eldest brother of the Saint, who was the son of Francis Louis and his first wife, Margaret Cagliero, who were married in 1805. The wife died on 28 February 1811. Joseph Louis was the brother of the Saint with the same parents who were married on 6 June 1812.

[40] *Ibid.*, 38.

[41] Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 247 & 274.

[42] *Ibid.*, 249.

[43] *Ibid.*, 251.

The picturesque landscape included rolling hills and fertile valleys.[44] Although Don Bosco was born into a simple rural society, the area was rich in religious life, which deeply influenced him and his family.[45]

2.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development During Don Bosco's Infantile Stage

At this stage of infancy, parents play a critical role in the development of the child by instilling faith and religious values, which serve as a foundation for the child's early spiritual sense.[46] As such, Don Bosco's parents are the primary focus in this section.

2.2.1 The Father of Don Bosco

In his autobiography, Don Bosco recalled the death of his father as his earliest memory.[47] Francis Bosco passed away on May 11, 1817, at the age of 33,[48] when Don Bosco was only 21 months old.[49] Understandably, little John, still an infant, was too young to grasp the full tragedy of his father's death. Reflecting on this event later, Don Bosco wrote: "At that age I could not really understand what a tragedy had fallen on us in our father's death."[50]

It seems likely that the event was often discussed within the family, as Don Bosco was able to recount details about his father's passing in his Memoirs.[51] He

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[44] DBHS, vol. 1, 35.

[45] DBLW, 5.

[46] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 250.

[47] MO, 7-8.

[48] DBHS, vol. 1, 41.

[49] MO, 12.

[50] *Ibid.*, 8.

[51] *Ibid.*, 7. Don Bosco described his father's death: "One day he came home from work covered in sweat and imprudently went down into a cold cellar. That night he developed a high temperature, the first sign of a serious illness. Every effort to cure him proved vain. Within a few days he was at death's door."

described both his and his mother's emotions during this time, demonstrating a sense of shared sorrow, even as a child. He wrote: "I began crying too because she was crying."[52]

Although the early trauma of losing his father could have negatively impacted Don Bosco's emotional development, the steadfast presence of his devoted mother, Margaret Occhiena Bosco, played a pivotal role in ensuring his healthy upbringing.

2.2.2 The Mother of Don Bosco

The death of Francis Bosco placed the family in a precarious situation, exacerbated by the drought and famine of 1817–1818.[53] Despite these hardships, Mama Margaret remained resolutely devoted to her sons. She turned down a proposal of remarriage from an unnamed gentleman after the famine,[54] explaining: "God gave me a husband and God has taken him away. With his death the Lord put three sons under my care. I would be a cruel mother to abandon them when they needed me most."[55] This example of Mama Margaret's sacrifice and resilience likely left a lasting impact on Don Bosco, shaping his future dedication to serving the most vulnerable youth.

In addition to providing for her family's basic needs, Mama Margaret prioritized her sons' religious education. She asked them to kneel in prayer every morning and evening, reciting the prayers of the Diocese of Turin, as well as five decades of the Rosary each day.[56] These practices instilled a strong foundation of faith in young John, even during the challenging times of famine and poverty.

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[52] *Ibid*., 8.

[53] *Ibid*. During the winter in 1816-1817, there had been less snow than usual in Turin-Chieri-Castelnuovo. Much of the early planting was killed by the spring frosts, and a dry summer in 1817 followed.

[54] DBHS, vol. 1, 48.

[55] MO, 9.

[56] DBLW, 6.

2.2.3 The Virtue of Personal Development

Don Bosco's sense of basic trust was nurtured during this stage by his mother's unwavering care and religious education. Despite the loss of his father and the family's financial struggles, Mama Margaret's consistent guidance provided young John with the sense of security and trust necessary for healthy emotional development. Without her devoted nurturing, John might have succumbed to mistrust and withdrawal.[57]

Erikson's theory emphasizes that resolving the first psychosocial crisis, mistrust versus trust, is primarily achieved through maternal care.[58] Additionally, the parents' religious faith is a key factor in nurturing a child's early sense of trust.[59] However, while Erikson's model places significant importance on building basic trust, the foundation of Don Bosco's spiritual growth during this stage can be credited to his mother's religious example and teaching, which transcend the scope of Erikson's framework.

From a Christian perspective, the presence of children in faith-practicing families serves as a reminder of reliance on God, just as children place their trust in the care and love of their parents. Mama Margaret's faith and devotion provided the bedrock for Don Bosco's trust in God, laying the groundwork for his spiritual growth.[60]

2.3 The Significant Elements During Don Bosco's Infantile Stage

There is a strong connection between Don Bosco's response of faith toward God and the religious upbringing he received within his family. His deep devotion to God was shaped by parental care, particularly the guidance of his mother. The strong faith

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[57] Newman et. al., *Development through Life: A Psychosocial Approach*, 64-65.

[58] Erikson, *A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 600.

[59] Robert Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," *Philosophy Study* 7, no. 6 (June 2017): 284, https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5313/2017.06.001.

[60] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 284.

of Francis Bosco and the exemplary devotion of Mama Margaret provided a solid foundation for Don Bosco's basic trust in God. Supporting this understanding, Don Bosco himself wrote in his Memoirs: "Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion, making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age."[61] This family-centered approach to religious education not only nurtured Don Bosco's personal and spiritual growth but also inspired his lifelong commitment to serving the poor.[62] At the heart of this parental upbringing was Jesus Christ, whose teachings provided guidance and trust. Mama Margaret's constant presence and support acted as a source of motivation, instilling in Don Bosco the importance of keeping God central in his life and maintaining a strong relationship with Him.

Additionally, the family's experience of living in poverty became a significant factor in shaping Don Bosco's vocational commitment to assisting the poor and marginalized. Mama Margaret's steadfast care and spiritual leadership ensured that Don Bosco grew up morally and spiritually strong, even when faced with adversity.[63]

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[61] MO, 9.

[62] DBLW, 7. The natural and supernatural orders were tacitly impressed on John's mind as he learned of the ties that united the frail human person to God as creature or adopted child.

[63] DBHS, vol. 1, 51.

3. Don Bosco's Toddlerhood Stage (2-4 years old)

After the death of little John's father, his family was forced to leave the farm of Biglione and move to a small house in Becchi in November 1817.[64] Mama Margaret became the head and breadwinner of this family at that time.[65] According to Erikson's theory, a sense of autonomy is the focus at this stage, with a person developing self-control and willpower.[66] Basic healthy trust is the foundation for developing the sense of autonomy. In this stage of development, the toddler builds basic faith in themselves and the world around them.[67] This sense of autonomy correlates with the principle of law and order, and therefore, the toddler's sense of justice is formed through this connection.[68]

3.1 The Social Context at Don Bosco's Toddlerhood Stage

According to the study of Fr. Lenti, the parish was the center of religious and social life in Piedmont. Catholic faith and religious tradition were deeply rooted in the Piedmontese culture.[69] For example, little John was baptized in St. Andrew parish Church of Castelnuovo the day after his birth.[70] The Bosco brothers were encouraged to pray every day,[71] and to attend Sunday Mass in dignified clothes made by their mother.[72] Generally speaking, the family held their Catholic faith in high regard.

In addition to these religious attributes, the character of the Piedmontese

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[64] DBHS, vol. 1, 40. Francis bought the little house of Becchi from Mr. Francis Graglia on 17 February 1817, which was near the farm of Biglione.

[65] *Ibid.*, 169.

[66] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 251-254.

[67] Id., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 71.

[68] Id., *Childhood and Society*, 254.

[69] DBHS, vol. 1, 172.

[70] *Ibid.*, 40.

[71] BM, vol. 1, 67-69.

[72] *Ibid.*, 54-55.

peasantry was marked by industriousness, hard work, and perseverance.[73] These factors are significant when considering the moral, religious, and spiritual development of little John at this stage.

3.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development at This Stage

3.2.1 The Craft Training by Mama Margaret

Mama Margaret was the most significant person for Don Bosco at this stage using craft training as a means to educate her sons. Although little John was young, simple chores or housework were entrusted to him and his brothers in order to deter them from idleness.[74] After completing the assigned tasks, little John could enjoy playing or creating playthings by his own.[75] This sense of structure and responsibility might have laid the initial foundation for Don Bosco's preventive system of pedagogy.[76]

3.2.2 The Friends of Little John

Little John loved to play with his friends from around the age of four. They often played ball games,[77] which were quite exciting and energetic. John was hurt several times while playing, which worried Mama Margaret. She tried to stop little John from participating in the game, but he explained: "I won't play with them any more if you

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[73] DBHS, vol. 1, 172.

[74] BM, vol. 1, 38.

[75] *Ibid*.

[76] Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Societa di S. Francesco di Sales* (Trino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1877), 3-13. The preventive system in the education of the young, which was the youth pastoral experience of Don Bosco, is in general use in Salesian houses, including loving kindness, reason and religion.

[77] BM, vol. 1, 38. Fr. Lemoyne described the game Don Bosco played in his toddler age: "At this early age he would whittle small pieces of wood to make balls and sticks for a game called *galla* in which one player strikes a ball with a small flat piece of wood towards his opponent and the latter swats it back with a long stick."

don't want me to. But when I'm there they do whatever I say and they don't fight."[78] This statement provides a glimpse into John's budding leadership abilities and influence among his peers. Ultimately, Mama Margaret allowed him to continue playing, recognizing his positive impact on the group.[79] This simple yet significant incident foreshadowed Don Bosco's future vocation and apostolic work.**The Virtue of Personal Development**

Little John's sense of self-control and justice was nurtured by Mama Margaret's religious formation and emphasis on responsibility. She guided him with care, granting him the freedom to explore and develop his autonomy under her prudent supervision. Without this proper family education, Don Bosco might have experienced feelings of shame and doubt.[80]

Mama Margaret diligently maintained a balance in her family's education to help her children avoid potential psychosocial crises. This aligns with Erikson's emphasis on the parents' role in nurturing autonomy with consistency and patience.[81] By doing so, children are protected from meaningless, arbitrary experiences of shame or early doubt.[82]

While Erikson's theory does not specifically explore how faith is built, it is reasonable to suggest that a solid foundation of faith, like that of Don Bosco, was deeply influenced by maternal care. From the perspective of faith, this stage offers an opportunity to instill the belief that God is the creator and sustainer of all things.

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[78] *Ibid*.

[79] *Ibid.*, 38-39.

[80] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 254.

[81] Id., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 73. The parent's role is one of consistency and patience: "Be firm and tolerant with the child at this stage, and he will be firm and tolerant with himself. He will feel pride in being an autonomous person; he will grant autonomy to others; and now and again he will even let himself get away with something."

[82] Id., *Childhood and Society*, 252.

Mama Margaret's religious family education helped develop John's understanding of concepts such as law and justice, which were essential to his personal and spiritual growth.[83]

3.3 The Significant Elements During Don Bosco's Toddlerhood Stage

During his toddler years, Don Bosco was already recognized as a leader among his peers. They listened to him, followed his guidance, and, under his influence, worked to become better Christians.[84] Under divine guidance and Mama Margaret's strong family education, these childhood experiences laid the groundwork for his future mission.

The combination of family religious education, craft training, the industrious characteristics of the Piedmontese peasantry, and his childhood leisure experiences all contributed to nurturing Don Bosco's vocation. Mama Margaret's deep faith and religious teachings further inspired Don Bosco's spiritual development.

At this stage, her education or guidance can be seen as a path pointing toward Christ. She instilled in her son the concept of God as both infinitely majestic and infinitely loving. These ideas, rooted in the Lord's Prayer, became fundamental to Don Bosco's deep convictions and were fostered through his mother's influence.[85]

The practice of prayer and these deeply held convictions motivated Don Bosco and became central to his development. Moreover, John's sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in his interactions with his peers likely played a motivating role, further enhancing his desire to accompany and nurture their personal and spiritual growth.

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[83] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 285.

[84] BM, vol. 1, 38-39.

[85] DBHS, vol. 1, 173.

4. Don Bosco's Early School Age Stage (4-6 years old)

Attending kindergarten is a common practice in modern pre-school education, but it was not customary in the 19th century. During this stage, Don Bosco's pre-school education took place in a rural environment under the guidance of his mother. For example, despite his young age, little John was given responsibilities such as taking care of the turkeys and the cow.[86]

A sense of initiative is the primary focus of this stage. Erikson described initiative as building on a child's sense of autonomy. It allows them to plan, take on tasks, and finish them, fostering independence.[87] Children at this stage attempt to take initiative, driven by their motivation and judgment, to assert their individuality.[88] Consequently, this sense of initiative fosters learning, action, and the development of a sense of moral responsibility.[89]

4.1 The Social Context During Don Bosco's Early School Age Stage

In the 19th century Piedmontese society, families were typically patriarchal, with the eldest male sibling succeeding as the head of the family after the father's death.[90] At the small house in Becchi, following the death of Francis Bosco, it was assumed that Anthony, as the eldest son, would take on this role. However, as Anthony was still in early adolescence and not yet ready to lead, the family instead operated under a matriarchal structure. Initially, the grandmother assumed this role,[91] but after her

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[86] Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, translated by Roger M. Luna (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1979), 14.

[87] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 255.

[88] *Ibid*.

[89] *Ibid.*, 255-256.

[90] DBHS, vol. 1, 171.

[91] Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, 14. Margaret Zucca, the grandmother of Don Bosco, died in 1826.

passing, Mama Margaret took on full authority.[92]

This leadership transition led to certain family conflicts during Don Bosco's early years. Despite these tensions, Mama Margaret continued to oversee the family's religious education as the head of the household. Her role profoundly shaped little John's faith and his response to God.

Another noteworthy aspect of the social context was the presence of the Bible or hagiographies of saints in most peasant homes during this period. On Sunday evenings, families would gather to read a few pages from these books, either in the stables during winter or on the patio during summer.[93] This custom probably played a significant role in Don Bosco's religious formation during his childhood.

4.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development at This Stage

4.2.1 Constant Supervision and Firm Guidance of Mama Margaret

During this stage, Mama Margaret continued to play an essential role in the family's religious education. Her parenting was characterized by constant supervision and firm guidance to ensure her children behaved properly.[94] Life in the small house at Becchi was governed by two essential family rules: first, the children were not allowed to associate with strangers, and second, they could not leave the house without their mother's permission.[95] These rules, alongside Mama Margaret's consistent oversight and firm discipline, shaped little John's obedience and moral conscience. Mama Margaret's influence solidifies her role as a key figure in the personal development of St. John Bosco.

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[92] *Ibid.*

[93] BM, vol. 1, 40.

[94] *Ibid*.

[95] *Ibid.*, 41.

4.2.2 The Teaching about Loving Kindness and Reasoning by Mama Margaret

Don Bosco learned the principles of loving kindness and reasoning through his mother's example. On one occasion, little John noticed that a turkey cock was missing from the family farm. Trusting his intuition, he suspected that a tall, bearded man passing by might have taken it. After some confrontation, the stranger admitted that he had taken the turkey as a joke. John, however, accused the man of dishonesty.

When John reported the incident to his mother, Mama Margaret responded with a lesson in charity and prudence, saying:

> You know that I don't care to insist on my rights at the risk of offending the spirit of charity or getting into trouble with my neighbors. I don't like to quarrel over a bunch of grapes or some fruit that somebody might steal. If necessary, we can warn them; but the world won't come to an end over such trifles.[96]

From this, little John learned the value of charity and understood the importance of approaching conflicts with understanding. Mama Margaret's gentle reasoning and loving guidance helped him to develop a sense of morality, obedience, and conscience. This lesson became an early inspiration for Don Bosco's preventive system of education, which centered on love, reason, and religion—principles he personally experienced through his mother's guidance.

Fr. Lemoyne underscored Mama Margaret's approach to education, stating: "Punishment should not arouse anger, mistrust, and estrangement. Her guiding principle on this point was to lead her children to do all things out of love and to please the Lord."[97] This statement highlights the connection between Don Bosco's educational methods and his mother's guidance. It shows how her principles influenced the development of his preventive system of education, which was built on

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[96] *Ibid.*, 62.

[97] *Ibid.*, 46.

the three core elements of loving kindness, reason, and religion.

4.2.3 The Virtue of Personal Development

Through his mother's family education, little John developed a strong sense of moral responsibility. Under Mama Margaret's constant supervision and firm direction, he grew to understand the importance of obedience and conscience. Her pious example further instilled in him a sense of purpose in the Christian life, rooted in rational, loving kindness.[98]

Erikson's theory emphasizes that the voice of God, though unseen, shapes the child's conscience and becomes the foundation of morality.[99] This notion aligns with little John's spiritual development, as he gradually internalized notions of right and wrong by observing and imitating his parents' religious practices.[100] These practices enabled him to comprehend and replicate the meaning of religious and moral acts.

Erikson also recognized that a lack of proper guidance during this stage could lead to a crisis of guilt.[101] However, for little John, the nurturing environment created by his family safeguarded him from such a crisis. Instead, it fostered his spiritual understanding and moral initiative in alignment with his Christian faith.[102]

4.3 The Significant Elements of Don Bosco's Early School Age Stage

Mama Margaret's religious education and exemplary guidance played a pivotal role in shaping Don Bosco's faith—a faith that later influenced his charism and mission. Her methods, combining constant supervision, firm guidance, and reasoning, provided the foundational elements for Don Bosco's preventive system of education

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[98] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 274.

[99] Id., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 84. The child now feels not only ashamed when found out but also afraid of being found out. He now hears, as it were, God's voice without seeing God. Moreover, he automatically begins to feel guilty even for mere thoughts and for deeds which nobody has watched.

[100] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 286.

[101] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 255.

[102] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 285.

and personal motivation to follow Christ.

Fr. Lemoyne encapsulated her influence by stating: “Under the guidance of his mother, John was absorbing that remarkable gentleness of manner that forestalls trouble and enables the educator to conquer the hearts of his pupils.”[103] While Erikson’s theory explains the development of initiative at this stage, it does not fully account for the virtues of gentleness and reason that emerged from Mama Margaret’s family religious formation. In essence, Don Bosco’s charism was deeply rooted in his mother’s prudent guidance and teachings, which shaped both his personal and spiritual development.

[103] BM, vol. 1, 49.

5. Don Bosco's Middle Childhood Stage (6-12 years old)

During this stage, the social and educational universe of young John expanded, influenced by his elementary education, religious activities, and family conflicts. In addition to the formative role of his mother, his teacher and companions were instrumental in shaping his faith response to God.

According to Erikson's theory, the sense of industry is the key focus during this stage of development. Children develop a sense of purpose by earning recognition for their achievements and seeking to perform tasks well, fostering a sense of duty, mastery, and collaboration.[104] Through these experiences, children attempt to engage with the adult world and navigate its challenges.

5.1 The Social Context at Don Bosco's Middle Childhood Stage

During Don Bosco's middle childhood stage, compulsory public education had not yet been established in the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont. However, two models of primary education were prevalent in the region. The first was small, local private primary schools, typically operated by priests. The second involved older, educated individuals teaching children how to read and write.[105]

In 1822, King Charles Felix (reign: 1821-1831) initiated school reforms in the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont.[106] These reforms mandated compulsory primary education in municipal towns. This program, which lasted for two years, was usually taught by priests was typically led by priests, as formal teacher training was not introduced until the 1860s.[107] The curriculum for the first year covered reading, writing, and catechism, while the second year focused on Italian, arithmetic, and

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[104] Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 91.

[105] DBHS, vol. 1, 175.

[106] *Ibid.*, 229.

[107] *Ibid.*, 175-176.

Christian doctrine.[108] Although this education was compulsory and tuition-free, peasant children often attended school only from November to March, as they were needed on family farms from April to October.[109]

Two other significant social factors likely influenced Don Bosco's development: his first Confession and first Communion. These Sacraments were pivotal moments in his life. At that time, it was customary for children to receive the Sacrament of Confession around six or seven years old, while first Communion was typically reserved for those aged eleven or older.[110]

5.2 The Significant People and the Virtue of Personal Development at This Stage

In his autobiography, Don Bosco documented the significant events surrounding his first Confession and his early experiences with formal education. Two key figures, Mama Margaret and Fr. Joseph Lacqua,[111] played a formative role in his development during this period.

5.2.1 The Preparation of Little John's First Confession and First Communion

Before receiving his first Communion at Easter in 1827, young John attended the confessional with his mother three times during the preceding Lenten season.[112] On the day of his first Communion, he observed silence to recollect his thoughts, focusing on preparation and thanksgiving under his mother's close guidance.[113] She encouraged him to pray and read spiritual books, demonstrating her influence in shaping both his moral upbringing and religious foundation. Her role laid the

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[108] *Ibid.*, 176.

[109] *Ibid*.

[110] DBLW, 7, 10-11.

[111] DBHS, vol. 1, 194-195. "Fr Joseph Lacqua was born in Montabone on 18 January 1764 and died at Castelletto Merli on 3 January 1847, at the age of nearly 83. In 1824, when John Bosco began attending the Capriglio school, he was only 60 years old."

[112] *Ibid.*, 174.

[113] *Ibid.*

groundwork for his strong sacramental life.

Reflecting on his first Confession, which occurred when he was six or seven years old, Don Bosco described his mother's guidance: "I remember well how she herself prepared me for my first confession. She took me to the Church, made her own confession first, then presented me to the confessor."[114] Afterward, his mother helped him express his gratitude and continued accompanying him to Confession until he was mature enough to go independently.

5.2.2 Fr. Joseph Lacqua

Fr. Joseph Lacqua played a significant role in inspiring Don Bosco's vocation during his formal years of education.[115] Don Bosco noted: "My teacher was a devout priest called Joseph Delacqua [*sic*]. He was very attentive to my needs, seeing to my instruction and even more to my Christian education."[116] According to Fr. Lenti's research, Fr. Lacqua's guidance not only inspired Don Bosco's vocation but possibly also sparked his first dream.[117] Fr. Lacqua viewed young John as an exceptional student and encouraged him to deepen his growth in Christian spirituality.[118] Through the stories of saints shared by Fr. Lacqua, Don Bosco developed a desire to emulate their virtuous lives. Although little is documented about his early education, it is clear that Don Bosco was inspired by priests like Fr. Lacqua and aspired to follow their example.[119]

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[114] MO, 9.

[115] DBHS, vol. 1, 177. Fr. Joseph Lacqua was the teacher of little John at Capriglio during the winter of 1824-25. At first, the priest did not want to accept the boy and his mother's request because they belonged to the public school in Castelnuovo, according to their domicile. Eventually, Fr. Lacqua accepted little John attending the public school in Capriglio because of a request by an aunt of John, Maria Giovanna (Marianna) Occhiena, who was the housekeeper of the priest in 1824-1847.

[116] MO, 9-10. St. John Bosco may have made a spelling mistake on the name of his first teacher. Fr. Joseph Lacqua was the correct name, instead of Delacqua.

[117] DBHS, vol. 1, 177.

[118] BM, vol. 1, 75.

[119] *Ibid*., 76.

5.2.3 The Peer Group of Young John

During his leisure time, particularly on Sundays and feast days, young John created an initial model for his future oratory. This initiative fostered his sense of industriousness in relationships with peers and his vocational purpose.[120] At the age of ten, he began organizing a festive oratory. This involved reciting the Sunday morning sermon, conducting catechetical talks, storytelling, entertaining performances, and leading prayers.

Because many people found it difficult to travel long distances to Castelnuovo or Buttigliera, attending a sermon or catechism class became an integral part of the oratory's schedule.[121] These sessions were structured so that religious activities occurred first, followed by entertainment.[122]

Reflecting on these gatherings, Don Bosco remarked:

> When I appeared, my companions and even grown-ups would run to me in a crowd and clamor for a story from a fellow who scarcely understood what he had read. At times, along the road to Castelnuovo or in some field I would be surrounded by hundreds of people, anxious to hear what a poor child had to say.[123]

Through these gatherings, young John emerged as a leader and spiritual guide for his friends. His aim was clear: to draw people closer to God. It is likely that his mother's influence on fostering his sense of responsibility and spirituality inspired this early model of the oratory.

5.2.4 The Virtue of Personal Development

Young John's sense of industry—cultivated through spirituality, Christian

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[120] MO, 27-28.

[121] DBLW, 12-13.

[122] MO, 27-29.

[123] *Ibid*., 27.

education, relationships with peers, and his vocational calling—was nurtured by both maternal care and elementary education. His mother and Fr. Lacqua helped instill in him a strong sense of responsibility and collaboration, which helped him build confidence and avoid feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.[124] Despite challenges like sibling conflicts at home, these positive relationships played a critical role in his healthy development.

While Erikson's concept of a sense of industry does not explicitly encompass spiritual growth, Don Bosco's development during this stage demonstrated a deepening sense of sanctification. His progress combined personal sanctity with a commitment to serve others, as exemplified in his oratory efforts. Religious education during this period encouraged both participation in church worship and a stronger commitment to faith,[125] aligning closely with Erikson's emphasis on collaboration and meaningful work.[126]

5.3 The Significant Elements at Don Bosco's Middle Childhood Stage

Encouraging others to trust in God became a defining element of Don Bosco's middle childhood. This expression of faith marked an early mission and a foundational component of his future charism. Although still developing his own faith, Don Bosco displayed leadership by guiding his companions spiritually. He reflected:

> Though I was still pretty small, I was studying my companions' characters. When I looked closely at someone, I could usually gauge what he was thinking. This gift won me the love and esteem of the boys my own age, and I was this in demand as judge or friend.[127]

Through his early oratory, young John served as both a recipient of external guidance

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[124] Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 87-93.

[125] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 286.

[126] Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 93.

[127] MO, 27.

and a provider of it. His actions reflected his dedication to personal and spiritual growth, as well as his commitment to nurturing the faith of others.[128] This spiritual maturity, fostered by his mother and Fr. Lacqua, motivated him to grow closer to God while encouraging others to do the same.

In summary, Don Bosco's focus during this stage was not simply on personal sanctification but also on the sanctification of others. His early oratory, shaped by the influence of key individuals in his life, became a model for spiritual growth and laid the foundation for the Salesian charism.

[128] DBLW, 13.

6. Don Bosco's Adolescence Stage (12-18 years old)

During this stage, young John Bosco transitioned from a rural village setting to the broader life of provincial towns while pursuing his education. He attended the primary school in Castelnuovo in December 1830 and the public secondary school in Chieri in November 1831.[129] This period marked a pivotal time in John's life as he searched for his vocation—a journey of self-discovery and identity formation.[130] In line with Erikson's theory of adolescence, this stage involved developing ego identity, which fostered John's virtues of devotion and fidelity, [131] along with his self-confidence and holistic well-being.[132]

6.1 The Social Context at Don Bosco's Adolescence Stage

The hiring of stable boys and the contemporary educational system were key social influences in Don Bosco's adolescent years.

First, it was common practice in rural villages for stable boys to be hired for farm labor beginning on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, which marked the start of the working season.[133] John himself worked as a stable boy on the Cascina Campora in Serra di Buttigliera during the winter of 1827 and later on the Moglia farm from February 1827 to November 1829.[134] During this period, conflicts frequently arose between John and his brother Anthony, as discussed further below.

Second, the compulsory and free two-year primary education system in Castelnuovo, which resembled that of Capriglio, was a result of the 1822 school reforms under King Charles Felix. In Castelnuovo, the availability of teaching

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[129] DBLW, 21-25.

[130] Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 94.

[131] Id., *Childhood and Society*, 274.

[132] Id., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 94.

[133] DBHS, vol. 1, 201.

[134] *Ibid.*, 216.

resources and manpower exceeded that of the countryside, and the atmosphere of religious education was particularly strong. Morning, afternoon, and evening prayers were part of the school schedule, and students began each day with diocesan catechism and Christian doctrine for the first half-hour. On Saturday afternoons, they continued their religious studies. Mass attendance before class was encouraged, and monthly Confession was required; students had to submit a certificate of Confession every two months. The bishop oversaw the moral and religious conduct of teachers, who were often priests and could be dismissed if found morally unsatisfactory.[135]

Secondary education, following the same 1822-school reforms, featured study of Latin and Italian language and literature in a six-year program.[136] Although this education was free, tuition fees could be charged with government approval to supplement teacher salaries if needed. Secondary schools emphasized the moral and religious conduct of students and teachers. Strict regulations were in place: students were prohibited from visiting theaters, gambling venues, dance halls, pubs, restaurants, and other such locations. Swimming, loitering, and forming cliques were also forbidden. Additionally, students were required to live with their families, in boarding schools, or in approved hostels.[137]

The strong emphasis on religious and moral formation in both primary and secondary schools likely played a significant role in nurturing young John's faith development during these formative years.

6.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development at this Stage

This stage in Don Bosco's life was greatly influenced by two key individuals: Fr.

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[135] *Ibid.*, 229-231.

[136] *Ibid.*, 251. The six-year curriculum of the secondary school focused on the study Latin and Italian language and literature. In ascending order (low to high) the years were numbered and named as follows: Sixth (preparatory), Fifth, Forth, Third Grammar, Second Humanities and First Rhetoric.

[137] *Ibid.*, 250-255.

John Calosso and Louis Comollo. Their roles were instrumental in shaping his faith journey and personal growth. Additionally, the conflicts within his family were significant in his development.

6.2.1 Conflicts in Bosco's Family

The relationship between young John and his brother Anthony was often strained, with clashes occurring between 1826 and 1827, as well as between 1829 and 1830.[138] The trouble with Anthony began after John completed his first year of schooling with Fr. Lacqua in Capriglio in 1825.[139] Over the years, the conflict escalated, driven by disagreements over the distribution of labor in agricultural work and the family's financial responsibilities.[140] These tensions appeared to stem from Anthony's struggle to foster a sense of self-worth.

As an adolescent and young adult, Anthony may have felt inferior to John, who had the opportunity to pursue his studies, or he might have been grappling with an identity crisis.[141] This struggle for identity was likely tied to a desire for acceptance from others. Anthony's feelings of self-isolation could have stemmed from the loss of his father, which left him orphaned at the age of nine. As a result, young John may not have fully grasped Anthony's internal struggles, leading to recurring conflicts.

Their conflicts had a profound impact on the family. One instance, recorded in Chapter 5 of Don Bosco's autobiography,[142] reads: "My mother was heartbroken, I

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[138] *Ibid.*, 207.

[139] *Ibid.*, 197.

[140] *Ibid.*, 197-198.

[141] Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 214-215.

[142] MO, 41-42. Don Bosco recalled the conflicts between him and Anthony: "During the winter, when there was no pressure of farm work, Anthony was reasonable enough about the time I gave to my books. When Spring came, however, and work was more pressing, he began to grumble that he was left to tackle all the chores while I was wasting my time and acting the gentleman. After some lively exchanges involving Anthony, my mother, and me, it was decided in the interest of family peace that I should go to school in the morning and work in the fields in the afternoon."

"Despite all my work and good will, Anthony still was not happy. One day he announced very

was in tears myself."[143] At one point, to preserve peace in the household, John was sent by his mother to work as a stable boy. This experience led him to work on the Moglia farm,[144] though he intentionally omitted this detail from his autobiography, likely to shield his mother from criticism, as suggested by Salesian scholars.[145]

Despite the serious family conflicts, young John remained motivated to study, driven by his unwavering desire to become a priest. He had already expressed his intention to pursue the priesthood to Fr. Calosso. This lifelong dream, which began when he was nine years old, likely fueled his steadfast determination to achieve his goal.[146]

The conflict with his brother was ultimately resolved when Anthony reached the age of majority.[147] John's struggles began to ease in late 1830, when Uncle Michael and Mama Margaret devised a plan to divide their father's estate among the three Bosco children. This division included the house, land, animals, tools, goods, and money.[148] Fr. Lenti described this development as a significant turning point in young John's life.[149]

In summary, while John, like most adolescents, searched for his identity and

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decisively, first to my mother and then to my brother, Joseph, that he could stand it no more. 'I've had it up to here,' he blustered. 'I've had my fill of this grammar business. Look at me,' he said, 'I've grown big and strong without ever setting eyes on such books.'

'That's nonsense!' Carried away by blind rage, I retorted in a way I should not have: 'Our donkey is bigger and stronger than you are, and he never went to school either. Do you want to be like him?' This so angered him that only speed saved me from a volley of blows and smacks."

[143] *Ibid.*, 42.

[144] DBHS, vol. 1, 199-202.

[145] DBLW, 16.

[146] MO, 32-36. At the age of nine, Don Bosco had the first, great dream which marked his entire life. He saw a multitude of very poor boys who play and blaspheme. A Man of majestic appearance told him: With meekness and charity you will conquer these your friends; and a Lady just as majestic added: Make yourself humble, strong and robust. At the right time you will understand everything.

[147] In 1830, Anthony was at the age of twenty-two, and heading to get marry.

[148] DBHS, vol. 1, 217.

[149] *Ibid.*, 209.

vocation, his unwavering determination enabled him to transform family conflicts into a deeper devotion to God's will. This resilience further strengthened his fidelity and supported his spiritual growth.

6.2.2 Fr. John Calosso[150]

Fr. John Calosso (1760–1830) emerged as a father figure in John's life. As noted by Fr. Lenti: "John was fortunate enough, as he was growing up, to meet priests who qualified as father figures. Father Calosso was the first true father figure, and an outstanding one, to come into John's life."[151]

During the Jubilee of 1829, proclaimed by Pope Pius VIII, 14-year-old John encountered Fr. Calosso by chance after a preparatory triduum of sermons at Buttigliera on November 5–7.[152] Don Bosco confirmed this encounter in his autobiography, describing his teacher as a holy priest.[153]

When John shared his intention to pursue the priesthood with Fr. Calosso, Don Bosco later wrote:

> I put myself completely into Fr. Calosso's hands. He had become chaplain at Murialdo only a few months before. I bared my soul to him. Every word, thought, and act I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to have an influence on both my spiritual and temporal welfare.[154]

Fr. Calosso provided John with regular study sessions at the chaplain's house, igniting new hope and aspirations in the young man. However, John still needed to remain ready to assist with work on his family's farm when necessary.[155]

The fatherly care and spiritual guidance of Fr. Calosso greatly influenced John's

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[150] Fr John Melchior Calosso at the age of 70 was a chaplain at St. Peter's chapel in Morialdo in 1829-1830.

[151] DBHS, vol. 1, 212.

[152] MO, 38. Buttigliera is about two miles northwest of Becchi.

[153] *Ibid.*, 35.

[154] *Ibid.*, 36.

[155] DBLW, 17-18.

personal and spiritual growth. Fr. Lenti observed that Fr. Calosso not only understood John's adolescent struggles but also acted as a paternal spiritual director, particularly in his advanced years.[156] Don Bosco later reflected in his autobiography: "It was then that I came to realize what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one's soul."[157]

Fr. Calosso guided John in adopting daily spiritual practices such as short meditations, spiritual reading, and frequent confession and communion—emphasizing these practices over penances.[158] These early spiritual exercises would later form the foundation of the daily practices of the Salesians.[159]

Tragically, Fr. Calosso died after suffering a stroke on November 21, 1830, at the age of 71.[160] This was a profoundly traumatic event for John, leaving him feeling hopeless and isolated.[161] In an effort to help John cope with his grief, his mother, Mama Margaret, sent him to Capriglio to stay with his grandfather for solace.

While mourning, John had a dream that reminded him to place his trust in God rather than in men.[162] Fr. Stella vividly described John's state during this period,

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[156] DBHS, vol. 1, 212. In Don Bosco's autobiography, he said: "I idolized Fr. Calosso, loved him as if he were my father."

[157] MO, 36.

[158] *Ibid.*

[159] Cf. C, 88. The Community made one by the Eucharist: "The hearing of the Word finds its privileged place in the celebration of the Eucharist. This is the central act of every Salesian community: it is a daily festive celebration on a living liturgy. There the community celebrates the paschal mystery and unites itself to the immolated body of Christ it receives so as to build itself in him into a fraternal communion and renew its apostolic commitment……"

Cf. C, 90. The community in continual conversion: "……This commitment to conversion on the part of each member and of the whole community is brought to its fulfillment by the sacrament of Reconciliation. Prepared by the daily examination of conscience and received frequently according to the Church's directives……"

Cf. R, 71: "Every day the members will spend in common at least half an hour for meditation and some time in spiritual reading……"

[160] DBHS, vol. 1, 216.

[161] DBLW, 20.

[162] BM, vol. 1, 162-163. The detail of this Don Bosco's dream has not been found, but the Salesian scholars have given their comments based on this dream, which have been mentioned in the text.

noting that he was like any typical adolescent, deeply focused on himself. An inner voice whispered to him about his helplessness, inspiring him to redirect his hope towards his heavenly Father.[163]

Under Fr. Calosso's guidance between 1829 and 1830, John began to envision the idea of a father figure dedicated to the pastoral care of young people in need.[164] This vision became a defining aspect of his vocation and a critical element of his identity during adolescence.

6.2.3 Louis Comollo[165]

Louis Comollo was considered a hero by Don Bosco because of his spiritual richness.[166] The two became classmates at the school in Chieri in November 1834. Don Bosco reflected on their intimate friendship, saying: "I can say that from him I began to learn how to live as a Christian. I trusted him completely and he trusted me. We needed each other: I needed spiritual help; he needed a bodyguard."[167]

Both friends were committed to pursuing virtue but differed greatly in character. Louis, though physically frail, was full of charity and had a mild temperament, as well as modest and humble manners. In contrast, young John, who was both strong and protective, often defended Louis from insults and bullying by their classmates.[168] On one occasion, Louis was mistreated by bullies, and John used his strength to stop the bullying. In response to his friend's intervention, Louis said: "John my friend, I'm amazed how strong you are. But, believe me, God didn't give you the strength to

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[163] DBLW, 21.

[164] DBHS, vol. 1, 214.

[165] BM, vol. 1, 249-256. Louis Comollo was born on 7 April 1817, in Apra, a hamlet near Cinzano, and died on 2 April 1839. From his childhood, he hoped to become a priest, and he used to gather some of his friends on Sunday and holy days in order to entertain them with edifying stories.

[166] DBLW, 32.

[167] MO, 79.

[168] *Ibid*., 76-80.

massacre your companions. His will is that we should love one another, forgive one another, and return good for evil."[169]

Louis became a spiritual role model for John, who placed his complete trust in him and learned how to live as a Christian. Together, they immersed themselves in spiritual practices such as Confession, Communion, meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and serving Mass.[170] Their friendship was one of sanctity, which profoundly enriched young John's spiritual life.[171]

In addition to Louis, the members of the Happy Times Association, a peer group founded by young John in 1833, were also valuable spiritual companions.[172] This group sought to grow in holiness together, embodying a spirit of mutual support and shared faith. The close-knit bond Louis and his companions shared laid the foundation for the Salesian youth group, whose mission would later center on sanctification and spiritual growth.[173]

6.2.4 The Virtue of Personal Development at Don Bosco's Primary and Secondary Educational Stages

Don Bosco's Christian identity was shaped significantly during his primary and secondary educational stages. During this time, as with many adolescents, he faced temptations that posed risks to his identity, a psychosocial crisis often experienced during adolescence.

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[169] *Ibid*., 79.

[170] *Ibid*., 76-80.

[171] DBHS, vol. 1, 267.

[172] *Ibid*., 259-261. The Happy Times Association was a club of teen-age lads. Two basic rules were adopted, (1) each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian, (2) exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties.

[173] Cf. C, 35. Introduction to ecclesial life: "We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it……."

Cf. R, 8: "In our educational work and pastoral settings the formation of groups and associations should be encouraged, according to age and interests, and their continuity should be ensured. Special care shall be taken of groups having a Christian commitment, and those shall be fostered which share the Salesian mission and live in its spirit……"

While studying in Castelnuovo and Chieri after leaving home, young John encountered a significant challenge to his Catholic identity for the first time. His classmates dared him to steal money, either from his landlord or his mother. However, John resolutely refused the dare, thanks to the strong religious foundation instilled in him by his family. Don Bosco later recounted this episode with pride:

> News of this episode got to the ears of my other companions, and no one else proposed to me anything wrong. My teacher heard of it as well and from then on was very kind to me. Even many of the boys' relatives heard of it and urged their sons to associate with me. I was therefore in a position to choose my friends, who loved me and would listen to me like the boys of Murialdo.[174]

This event not only earned him the admiration of his teacher but also the respect of his classmates' families, who encouraged their sons to associate with him. This newfound appreciation and support motivated John to continue developing his Catholic identity.[175]

Following this demonstration of integrity, John engaged in various activities for his landlord, such as learning music, playing the spinet and the organ, as well as sewing and cutting clothes. These time-consuming pursuits served as strategies to shield himself from temptations and to safeguard his Catholic identity,[176] helping him to avoid the confusion of identity that could arise during this stage of life. Furthermore, these practices enabled John to seek an inner coherence and strengthen his moral foundation.[177]

While Erikson's theory of psychosocial development aptly explains Don Bosco's sense of identity formation during this period, it falls short of capturing the depth of his spiritual growth on both personal and communal levels. Don Bosco's spiritual

[174] MO, 50.

[175] *Ibid.*, 47-50.

[176] DBHS, vol. 1, 234.

[177] Erikson, *A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980*, 605.

development and Catholic identity were deeply rooted in Christ, transcending the psychological framework to encompass a profound faith journey.[178]

6.3 The Significant Elements at Don Bosco's Adolescence Stage

According to the study above, Don Bosco's patience and confidence in God can be partly attributed to his experiences with family conflicts. His fidelity and loyalty to God were key elements in his spiritual foundation.[179] By practicing these virtues, the saintly priest was able to overcome his difficulties, transforming them into opportunities for spiritual growth. This, in turn, motivated him to follow Jesus Christ and faithfully respond to the Divine will. Fr. Lenti described John as having a strong ego, being self-reliant, and able to connect well with others. His reflective yet active and joyful personality was firmly rooted in his trust in God.[180] Consequently, the sanctification of John's personality was deeply influenced by his family background, whether it was marked by conflict or support.

Secondly, Don Bosco's vocation was heavily shaped by the presence of a spiritual father figure. Notably, Fr. Calosso became a role model who guided John in discovering his vocation. A profound bond of trust and identity blossomed between the spiritual director and the young man, one that transcended even a traditional father-son relationship. This nurturing relationship inspired John to discern and fulfill his vocation, aligned it with the Divine will. It also played a vital role in ensuring John's character development during his youth, as he gradually came to understand his calling.

Thirdly, the deep friendships within a Catholic peer group proved to be another vital element in John's spiritual journey. These friendships provided a foundation for

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[178] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 287.

[179] DBHS, vol. 1, 213.

[180] *Ibid.*, 211.

moral and religious growth, fostering profound spiritual richness. Within the Catholic youth group, the moral and religious life was emphasized, which likely nurtured John's moral maturity and holiness during his youth.[181] It can be concluded that spiritual accompaniment within such peer groups enriched his guidance and motivation in living out God's will. As John's social network expanded, his journey of sanctification evolved from a personal focus to a communal one.

In summary, John's personal sanctification became deeply intertwined with the sanctification of those around him, particularly his peers. It is worth emphasizing that young John not only benefited from guidance and motivation but also became a source of inspiration for those around him. Through these interactions, he motivated his peers and joined them in their collective pursuit of spiritual perfection.

[181] *Ibid.*, 259-260.

7. Don Bosco's Young Adulthood Stage (18-30 years old)

From 1835 to 1841, John Bosco completed his priestly formation at the seminary of Chieri.[182] After his priestly ordination in 1841,[183] he pursued an additional three years of further priestly education at the Pastoral Institute (Convitto) in Turin.[184] During this time, he not only developed his professional role as a priest through studies but also continued discerning his vocation and direction for ministry. His intimacy with God deepened during this period, rooted in the moral foundations instilled by his family, his Catholic peer group, and the spiritual mentorship of Fr. Calosso, as noted earlier. According to Erikson's theoretical framework, Don Bosco's ability to form a healthy sense of intimacy was tied to his identity development during adolescence, which enabling him to deepen his commitment to God.[185] This intimacy ultimately contributed to his capacity to nurture love and affiliation with both God and his neighbors, which required significant personal sacrifice.[186]

7.1 The Social Context of Don Bosco's Young Adulthood

The 19th century brought widespread socio-economic upheaval in Piedmont due to the Industrial Revolution. Many peasants migrated from rural areas to urban centers, with Turin experiencing particularly significant population growth.[187] Between 1838 and 1848, Turin's population grew by 16.89%, rising from 117,072 to 136,849 inhabitants.[188] Among this population, approximately 29,364 were under the age of

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[182] DBHS, vol. 1, 343.

[183] MO, 165-167.

[184] *Ibid.*, 180-182.

[185] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 263-266.

[186] *Ibid.*, 274.

[187] DBHS, vol. 1, 440.

[188] DBLW, 101.

twenty,[189] many of whom lived in poverty and abandonment, placing them at high risk of juvenile delinquency.[190]

In response to these challenges, vocational training schools and oratories were established to support marginalized youth, as traditional educational systems and local parishes were unable to address the particular needs of this migrant population.[191] This social phenomenon played a key role in awakening Don Bosco's awareness of his vocation.

The establishment of the seminary at Chieri, the third in the Archdiocese of Turin, also reflected the Church's response to these social and ecclesiastical changes. It arose partly to accommodate the growing number of seminarians and partly to address political and doctrinal issues of the time.[192]

At the political level, two key events affected the seminary in Turin: the revolutionary uprisings of 1821,[193] and the university student riots that occurred from January to March of the same year.[194] Although seminarians did not directly participate in these riots, they were indirectly impacted as they attended lectures at the university's school of theology, which maintained close ties with their seminary.[195]

At the doctrinal level, two contrasting pastoral viewpoints were being debated among the clergy and within the university: the benignist (kind) and rigorist (strict) pastoral approaches. The benignist perspective was championed by the Jesuits, the

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[189] *Ibid*.

[190] DBHS, vol. 1, 440.

[191] *Ibid*.

[192] *Ibid.*, 316. In 1825, the Archdiocese of Turin had 220 resident seminarians in the seminaries of Turin and Bra. Finally, Archbishop Chiaveroti established a third seminary in Cheiri in 1829.

[193] *Ibid.*, 319. On 10 March 1821, the revolution broke out in Piedmont forcing Prince Charles Albert to grant the Constitution. This was put down with Austrian intervention, and the Constitution was abolished. Charles Albert resigned from regency and went into voluntary exile.

[194] *Ibid*.

[195] *Ibid.*

Oblates of the Virgin Mary, the Catholic Friendship Association, and the Convitto for priests, which was under the direction of the theologian Fr. Louis Guala. The rigorist perspective, on the other hand, was more predominant within the university and the seminary.[196]

As a result of this theological dispute, the archbishop became concerned about the combined political and doctrinal impacts on priestly formation. Consequently, the establishment of the Seminary of Chieri was initiated. The atmosphere surrounding the seminary during this time may have influenced Don Bosco as he developed his passion for the priesthood, along with his growing intimacy with God and his neighbors.

7.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development at this Stage

During Don Bosco's formation years, three key figures played a significant role in shaping his vocational discernment: his mother, Mama Margaret; his seminary peer, Louis Comollo; and his spiritual mentor, Fr. Joseph Cafasso.

7.2.1 Mama Margaret's Influence

When Don Bosco donned his clerical habit during the solemn high Mass in the parish of Castelnuovo presided over by Fr. Peter Anthony Cinzano on 25 October 1835,[197] and prior to his departure for the seminary, Mama Margaret imparted unforgettable words of wisdom to her son:

> My dear John, you have put on the priestly habit. I feel all the happiness that any mother could feel in her son's good fortune. Do remember this, however: it's not the habit that honors your state, but the practice of virtue. If you should ever begin to doubt your vocation, then – for heaven's sake! – do not dishonor this habit. Put it aside immediately. I would much rather have a poor farmer for a son, than a priest who neglects his duties. When you came into the world, I consecrated you to

[196] DBLW, 36.

[197] DBHS, vol. 1, 330.

> the Blessed Virgin. When you began your studies, I recommended to you devotion to this Mother of ours. Now I say to you, be completely hers; love those of your companions who have devotion to Mary; and if you become a priest, always preach and promote devotion to Mary.[198]

Don Bosco carried this motherly advice in his heart throughout his life, treasuring the guidance he received at the outset of his priestly formation. His unwavering loyalty to the priestly vocation and his profound devotion to the Blessed Virgin were deeply influenced by his mother's spiritual exhortations. Mama Margaret had consecrated him to the Blessed Virgin at birth and encouraged him to foster devotion to Mary as he began his education. Much later, Don Bosco resolved to uphold seven commitments upon donning the clerical habit, which he read before an image of the Blessed Virgin. These resolutions, marked by a deep sense of sanctification, the practice of virtue, and detachment from worldly distractions, may also have stemmed from his mother's teachings.[199]

Following Don Bosco's first Mass in his home parish of Castelnuovo on 10 June 1841, his mother shared additional advice:

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[198] MO, 126.

[199] *Ibid.*, 122-123. After the Solemn Investiture of clerical habit, Fr. Cinzano insisted on John joining him at a dinner in Bardella. John felt bad and hated this kind of secular gathering which was not relevant to his clerical habit. Thus, he fixed seven resolutions in 1835 to guide his future decision making:

I. For the future I will never take part in public shows during fairs or at markets. Nor will I attend dances or the theater, and as far as possible I will not partake of the dinners usual on such occasions.
II. I will no longer play games of dice or do conjuring tricks, acrobatics, sleight of hand, tightrope walking. I will give up violin-playing and hunting. These things I hold totally contrary to ecclesiastical dignity and spirit.
III. I will love and practice a retiring life, temperance in eating and drinking. I will allow myself only these hours of rest strictly necessary for health.
IV. In the past I have served the world by reading secular literature. Henceforth I will try to serve God by devoting myself to religious reading.
V. I will combat with all my strength everything, all reading, thoughts, conversations, words, and deeds contrary to the virtue of chastity. On the contrary, I will practice all those things, even the smallest, which contribute to preserving this virtue.
VI. Besides the ordinary practices of piety, I will never neglect to make a little meditation daily and a little spiritual reading.
VII. Every day I will relate some story or some maxim advantageous to the souls of others. I will do this with my companions, friends, relatives, and when I cannot do it with others, I will speak with my mother.

> You are now a priest, and you celebrate Mass. You are, therefore, closer to Jesus Christ. But remember that to begin to say Mass is to begin to suffer. You will not become aware of this immediately, but little by little you will realize that your mother was right. I am sure that you will pray for me every day, whether I be still living or dead, and that is enough for me. From now on you must think only of saving souls; never worry about me.[200]

This heartfelt advice served as a call to total dedication to his priestly ministry. It aligned perfectly with Don Bosco's nine resolutions from 1841, which were rooted in priestly discipline, unwavering devotion to his ministry, and the active practice of virtues inspired by St. Francis de Sales.[201] These traits can also be traced back to the foundational religious education he received at home, further underscoring the profound spiritual influence of his family, especially his beloved mother.

7.2.2 Louis Comollo, an Exemplar of Spirituality and of Seminarians

Louis Comollo was regarded by Don Bosco as a model of spirituality and a trusted adviser during moments of vocational uncertainty.[202] Don Bosco described

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[200] BM, vol. 1, 388.

[201] *Ibid.*, 385. After St. John Bosco's ten-day spiritual retreat before his ordination in 1841, he established nine resolutions:

I. Never to go for a stroll unless for grave reasons like visiting the sick, etc.
II. To be very rigorous in the use of my time.
III. To suffer, work, humble myself in all things whenever it is a question of saving souls.
IV. The charity and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales are to be my guide.
V. I will always be satisfied with whatever food is presented to me, if not harmful to my health.
VI. I shall drink my wine mixed with water, and then only to the extent that it will benefit my health.
VII. Work is a powerful weapon against the enemies of the soul. Hence, I will not take more than five or six hours of sleep. I shall take no rest during the day, particularly after lunch. Only in case of illness shall I make an exception to this rule.
VIII. I shall set aside some time every day for meditation and spiritual reading. During the day I shall pay a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or at least raise my heart in prayer. I shall spend at least a quarter of an hour in preparation for Mass and another quarter of an hour in thanksgiving.
IX. I shall never indulge in conversations with women, except to hear their confession or when it is necessary for their spiritual welfare.

[202] DBHS, vol. 1, 347. In 1834-1835, Don Bosco was thinking about his vocational decision. Certainly, he discussed it with his good friend, Comllo, and he was advised making a novena for guidance. At the same time, Comollo wrote a letter consulting his uncle priest, Fr. Joseph Comollo, the parish priest of Cinzano, about John's worry in regard to his vocation. The priest advised John to enter the diocesan seminary till God made His will clear to him.

him as: “This marvelous companion was my fortune.”[203] The two spent two and a half years together in the seminary, during which Don Bosco developed a profound and holy friendship with his best companion.[204]

Don Bosco recounted how Louis Comollo often advised, corrected, or encouraged him, serving as a mentor-like figure and a model of virtue for any seminarian.[205] Throughout their time in the seminary, they consistently engaged in shared spiritual exercises, such as visiting the Blessed Sacrament for the dying, reciting the rosary, or saying the Little Office of Our Lady for the souls in purgatory.[206]

Comollo’s deep relationship with God, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and reverence for the saints were deeply appreciated by Don Bosco.[207] These qualities served as an enduring example for Don Bosco, who later incorporated them into his own methods for training and guiding youth. Comollo also instilled in Don Bosco a profound sense of personal sanctification, reinforcing his growing intimacy with God.

7.2.3 St. Joseph Cafasso[208]

St. Joseph Cafasso served as another spiritual father figure to Don Bosco. Their first meeting took place in the Chapel of St. Peter at Morialdo during a local feast in the summer of 1830.[209] Afterward, St. Cafasso became Don Bosco’s spiritual director for six years.[210] Don Bosco described him as both his spiritual and temporal guide:

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[203] MO, 134.

[204] DBHS, vol. 1, 356.

[205] MO, 134.

[206] *Ibid.*, 133.

[207] DBLW, 73.

[208] St. Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860) was a priest, moral theologian, preacher, and spiritual director. He was the co-founder and the first collaborator of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Without him, the work of Don Bosco could not come into being. Fr. Joseph Cafasso was canonized on 22 June 1947.

[209] MO, 47-48.

[210] *Ibid.*, 180-182.

"For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal. That holy priest listened to everything, the good money offers, the pressures from relatives and friends, my own goodwill to work."[211]

According to the studies of Fr. Lenti, Don Bosco achieved significant maturity in three areas under the guidance of Fr. Cafasso: humanly, theologically, and vocationally.[212] Reflecting on his personal growth, Don Bosco expressed his trust in St. Cafasso in his autobiography: "If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hand I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life."[213] Their bond was akin to a strong father-son relationship. Even regarding his fees at the seminary and the Pastoral Institute, this saintly priest-teacher gave Don Bosco invaluable financial support to help cover expenses.[214]

Don Bosco's theological maturity deepened during his studies at the Pastoral Institute from 1841 to 1844 under the mentorship of Fr. Luigi Guala and St. Cafasso.[215] This association helped shape him as a young priest, combining academic theological courses with practical aspects of ministry.[216] At a time when seminary theology was excessively abstract,[217] the pastoral training at the institute, coupled with St. Cafasso's guidance, provided Don Bosco with a more integrated and mature understanding of his sacred ministry.

After his ordination, Don Bosco twice consulted St. Cafasso regarding his

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[211] *Ibid.*, 180.

[212] DBHS, vol. 1, 479.

[213] MO, 182.

[214] DBHS, vol. 1, 474.

[215] *Ibid.*, 473-474. St. Francis of Assisi's Resident Pastoral Institute for Priests (Pastoral Institute) was founded by Fr. Luigi Guala, and began operations for the academic year 1817-1818, with the enrollment of a dozen student priests. Moral and pastoral theology following the teaching of St. Alphonsus, and the practice of preaching were involved in the program offered by this institute.

[216] MO, 180.

[217] DBLW, 88.

priestly duties and vocational direction. In 1841, Don Bosco was presented with three offers: (1) to become a tutor in the household of a Genoese gentleman, (2) to serve as chaplain in Murialdo, or (3) to work as an assistant priest in Castelnuovo. Following Fr. Cafasso's advice, he chose instead to pursue further formation in moral theology and preaching at the Pastoral Institute.[218]

After three additional years of study at the Institute, Don Bosco faced another significant decision regarding his priestly ministry. Naturally, he sought guidance from his saintly mentor, St. Cafasso, who advised him to go on a retreat before making his choice. Following the retreat, St. John Bosco informed his spiritual director that he was contemplating joining the Oblates of the Virgin Mary and heading to the missions,[219] rather than accepting the suggested offers.[220] However, St. Cafasso reminded Don Bosco of his original calling to work with young people. With clarity and firmness, St. Cafasso instructed the young priest to set aside the idea of becoming a religious and to focus on serving the youth, which he affirmed was God's will for him.[221]

St. Cafasso gave explicit instructions: "Pack your bag and go with Dr. Borrelli. You'll become the director at the Little Hospital of St. Philomena, and you'll also work in the Refuge.[222] Meanwhile God will show what you have to do for the young."[223] Taking his mentor's advice to heart, Don Bosco began his mission,

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[218] MO, 180.

[219] DBHS, vol. 1, 492. Oblates of the Virgin Mary with the foreign missions in view might be considered by Don Bosco at that time.

[220] A curate of parishes, a tutor in the Pastoral Institute, and a director at the Little Hospital of St. Philomena were offered to Don Bosco at that moment.

[221] BM, Vol. 2, 159-164.

[222] Mary Refuge of Sinners was for abandoned and runaway girls less than fourteen years old, established by Marchioness Barolo who granted Don Bosco permission to continue his work with boys and young men in the area nearby the Refuge.

[223] MO, 203.

gradually aligning himself with God's will.

Spiritual reflection in Don Bosco's daily life was a significant element in his oratory and spiritual maturity. First, under the guidance of Fr. Cafasso, this young priest visited the youth in prisons. This deeply saddened him and prompted him to reevaluate his pastoral approach toward young people. Don Bosco observed a large number of young individuals, aged 12 to 18, in the prisons, and he began to reflect on how religious education and proper care might prevent these youth from returning to prison.[224] This represents a key example of the spiritual reflection that Don Bosco engaged in as he sought to refine his pastoral strategies based on his experiences.

Second, on December 8, 1841, the beginning of Don Bosco's oratory, a youth named Bartholomew Garelli wandered into the sacristy of the church and was cast out by the sacristan while Don Bosco was preparing for Mass. Afterward, Don Bosco sought out this young man and catechized him after the Mass.[225] This encounter inspired Don Bosco to begin serving young people like Bartholomew within the framework of the oratory, with the continued support of St. Cafasso.[226] Don Bosco later recounted:

> It was consoling for me to see forty or fifty youngsters outside my confessional during the week and especially on feast days, waiting hours and hours for their turns for confession. This is how things normally ran at the Oratory for nearly three years, up to the end of October 1844.[227]

This could well represent some of the content discussed during Don Bosco's spiritual direction dialogues with St. Cafasso. These examples illustrate how spiritual reflection

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[224] *Ibid.*, 182.

[225] DBLW, 91. The teaching of Christian doctrine to young people was an integral part of the pastoral training given to priests at the Pastoral Institute. In addition, along with catechism lessons went charitable assistance to needy young people.

[226] MO, 197.

[227] *Ibid.*, 202.

played a critical role in Don Bosco's daily life, enabling him to constantly review and refine his pastoral approach for youth and to develop the foundational spirituality of his oratory.

7.2.4 The Virtue of Personal Development

During his seminary formation and further priestly development, Don Bosco received significant support from Mama Margaret, the seminarian Louis Comollo, and St. Joseph Cafasso, all of whom played a role in helping the young priest fulfill his vocation. Analogically speaking, Don Bosco's sense of intimacy with God deepened through his daily spiritual exercises, studies, and pastoral work. Although Erikson's concept of intimacy primarily addresses human relationships, it can also reflect Don Bosco's spiritual connection with God.

Don Bosco's commitment and self-sacrifice as a priest were expressions of his profound devotion and love for God. Without this dedication, he might have experienced a deeper sense of isolation and, potentially, self-absorption.[228] From a religious perspective, Robert Pendergraft viewed this as an opportunity to deepen the salvific relationship in terms of spiritual intimacy. Grounding one's identity in the Church strengthens the bond between the individual and Christ, enabling a person to become a more committed and mature follower of Christ.[229]

7.3 The Significant Elements in Don Bosco's Young Adulthood

At this stage, Don Bosco's dedication first to God and then to the Church stands out as one of the most significant elements in his vocational discernment. Inspired by the challenges he faced, Don Bosco dedicated himself wholeheartedly to his priestly ministry and God's will. Despite facing many difficulties, Don Bosco placed his trust in God and offered himself entirely to Him and to the Church. This offering was

[228] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 263-264.

[229] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 287.

influenced by significant figures, who served as instrumental mediums in raising his awareness of these issues. Additionally, the motherly advice he received was an indispensable element in shaping Don Bosco's charism and vocation. Mama Margaret offered her special advice at four key moments in his life: his first communion, his choice of vocation, his investiture with clerical attire, and his priestly ordination.

Second, the practice of personal sanctification was nurtured through the healthy intimacy shared with his peers. Comollo served as a model to Don Bosco in personal sanctification. It is evident that Comollo and Don Bosco frequently engaged in conversations about spiritual matters, including topics such as death and salvation.[230] This spiritual encouragement and mutual support likely enhanced Don Bosco's personal sanctification and increased his intimacy with God.

Third, group sanctification within the context of youth pastoral work played a crucial role in developing spiritual reflection in Don Bosco's daily life. This pastoral-spiritual approach was centered around fostering sanctification through ministry with the youth. Reviewing his pastoral experiences with the guidance of spiritual principles allowed Don Bosco to deepen his connection and love for God.[231]

In summary, spiritual accompaniment emerged through Don Bosco's interactions with these significant figures, enabling him to discern God's call and carry out His Divine will. God poured out His grace on Don Bosco through these individuals, as well as through the challenges of guidance and motivation, guiding him to discern and fulfill his vocation and imitate Jesus Christ in a priestly manner.

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[230] MO, 151. Don Bosco said: "Given our friendship and the unlimited trust between Comollo and me, we often spoke about the separation that death could possibly bring upon us at any time."

[231] Cf. C, 12. Union with God: "As he works for the salvation of the young, the Salesian experiences the fatherhood of God and he continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work: Apart from me you can do nothing. He cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand. Attentive to the presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God's love he becomes like Don Bosco a contemplative in action."

8. Don Bosco's Adulthood Stage (30-60 years old)

During this stage, as Don Bosco was developing his service to the youth, his charism was gradually to take shape. The Oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and Guardian Angel were established in 1844, 1847, and 1849 respectively, coinciding with the early years of this phase in his life. Based on the foundation of these Oratories and the needs of youth, the workshops, the schools, and the Salesian Society followed as extensions of his mission.

We propose that Don Bosco's pastoral-educative charism, particularly his commitment to the care of youth, emerged during this stage. His work conveyed a sense of generativity as he focused on nurturing the next generation, which reflected his productivity and care.[232] While parental productivity, in the traditional sense, was not part of his priestly and religious life, Don Bosco expressed care akin to a parent through his charity and passion for education. This concern for youth can be interpreted as a profound dedication to the next generation, aligning with Erikson's explanation of generativity within the framework of ecclesiastical and religious service.[233]

8.1 The Social Context of Don Bosco's Adulthood Stage

This phase of Don Bosco's life, as analyzed by Fr. Stella, can be divided into two key periods: 1848–1855 and 1855–1875.[234] During the first period, two significant events stand out: (1) the temporary closure of the Turin archdiocesan seminary in 1848, and (2) the issuance of the Rattazzi Bill on May 29, 1855, which mandated the

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[232] Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 103.

[233] Id., *Childhood and Society*, 266-268. "Even where philosophical and spiritual tradition suggests the renunciation of the right to procreate or to produce, such an early turn to 'ultimate concerns,' wherever instituted in monastic movements, strives to settle at the same time the matter of its relationship to the Care for the creatures of this world and to the Charity which is felt to transcend it."

[234] DBLW, 133-141, 148-150.

suppression of religious congregations. Both developments were influenced by the movement toward national unity in Italy.[235]

Between 1848 and 1849—marked as revolutionary years—the first war of Piedmont against Austria became a pivotal moment. Revolutions broke out in various parts of Italy, all fueled by the nationalist pursuit of unity. Leading this nationalist movement was the House of Savoy, with Piedmont serving as a hub of strong liberal revolutionary activity during the period.[236] This revolutionary fervor also extended to seminarians, who were greatly influenced by the prevailing nationalist momentum. Although Archbishop Louis Marquis Fransoni (1789–1862) explicitly forbade priests and seminarians from participating in the movement, such orders were often ignored. Consequently, the seminary in Turin was temporarily suspended in February 1848 as a result of the turmoil.[237]

The introduction of the Rattazzi Bill, aimed at suppressing religious congregations, had profound implications. The bill stripped religious congregations of their special privileges, such as the right to hold land in perpetuity without taxation, exemption from personal taxation, and freedom from conscription. However, exemptions were granted to congregations engaged in teaching, nursing, or preaching. While the bill did not technically infringe upon citizens' freedom or rights, it was overtly antagonistic toward the Church and aligned with the objectives of the nationalist revolution. As a result, the government ceased providing financial subsidies to religious congregations, thus reducing state expenditures and offsetting the financial strain caused by the wars of 1848 and 1849.[238]

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[235] *Ibid.*, 133.

[236] DBHS, vol. 2, 151.

[237] *Ibid.*, 185-186.

[238] *Ibid*., vol. 3, 74.

From 1855 to 1875, the turbulent atmosphere created by the liberal revolution persisted. The Second War of Italian Independence began on April 26, 1859, lasting approximately two and a half months, with France and Piedmont allied against Austria. This was followed by the proclamation of Victor Emmanuel II as the King of Italy in 1861.[239] In 1866, the Third War of Italian Independence commenced, and on July 6 of that year, a law suppressing all religious corporations was enacted in the wake of Italy's unification.

Despite these challenges, the 19th century saw the founding of hundreds of new male and female religious congregations.[240] Furthermore, during the 1860s, the flow of immigrants and seasonal workers from farming areas began to decline. This trend coincided with the growth of industry and the emergence of a more systematically organized economic system, which created stable and permanent employment opportunities.[241]

8.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development at this Stage

There were several significant individuals and groups who assisted Don Bosco or supported the services he provided during the early stages of his work among the youth and the establishment of the Salesian Society. These included Fr. John Borel (1801–1873),[242] the maternal volunteers, the needy youth of that time, and Pope Blessed Pius IX.

8.2.1 Fr. John Borel

At the initial stages of the Oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and

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[239] *Ibid*., vol. 2, 104-107.

[240] DBLW, 148-150.

[241] DBHS, vol. 5, 47.

[242] Don Bosco always called Fr. Borel as Fr. Borrelli. The saint described Fr. Borel as a man of real holiness.

Guardian Angel,[243] Fr. John Borel was one of Don Bosco's closest companions. At that time, the young Don Bosco was assigned as the chaplain of the Little Hospital of St. Philomena and worked at Mary, Refuge of Sinners, from 1844 to 1846, under the guidance and assistance of Fr. Borel.[244]

According to the studies of Fr. Lenti, it was recorded that Fr. Borel stood by Don Bosco's side as his first and greatest collaborator, making him the prototype of the Salesian Cooperator.[245] Despite not officially being a Salesian, we propose that Fr. Borel was an exemplar for the Salesians due to his significant role in the establishment of the oratories. He served as a mentor to this young priest, teaching him how to gradually discern and fulfill God's will.

Don Bosco recalled that Fr. Borel inspired him in fulfilling his vocation during the Lenten retreat at the Chieri seminary in 1839. Fr. Borel delivered a sermon: "A vocation is perfected and preserved, and a real priestly spirit is formed, by a climate of recollection and by frequent communion."[246] These words made a deep impact on Don Bosco, who reflected on them throughout his priesthood and recorded them in his autobiography. To a certain degree, the charism of Don Bosco was nurtured by the advice and mentorship of this holy priest.[247] Don Bosco himself wrote:

> From the first moment that I met Dr. Borrelli, I always judged him to be a holy priest, a model worthy of admiration and imitation. Every time I was able to be with

[243] The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was established in the Pastoral Institute in 1844, and its permanent house was set up in Valdocco in 1846. The Oratory of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova was established in 1847. The Oratory of Guardian Angel was established in Vanchiglia in 1840 by Fr. Giovanni Cocchi, which was the first oratory in Turin. It was closed in 1849, but re-opened by Don Bosco and Fr. Borel in the same year.

[244] DBHS, vol. 2, 81.

[245] *Ibid.*, 74. When Don Bosco felt seriously ill and took a period of convalescence at Becchi in 1846, Fr. Borel directed the oratory instead of Don Bosco.

[246] MO, 157.

[247] *Ibid*., 203-204. During the three-year study in the Pastoral Institute, Fr. Borel always invited Don Bosco to join the sacred functions, to hear confessions and to preach with him in Mary Refuge of Sinners.

him, he always gave me lessons in priestly zeal, good advice, and encouraged me in doing good.[248]

Don Bosco often consulted Fr. Borel, and their collaboration was evident in key moments. For example, the Oratory of St. Aloysius was established in 1847 with the agreement and support of Fr. Borel.[249] It was solemnly dedicated by him on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. This kind of spiritual dialogue and mentorship profoundly influenced St. John Bosco, helping him gain deeper spiritual insight and successfully carry out the Divine plan.

8.2.2 The Maternal Volunteers

In the charism of Don Bosco, maternal volunteers played a significant role. Mama Margaret was the first maternal presence in Don Bosco's oratory in 1846. Don Bosco described the great sacrifice his mother made in moving to the oratory in Valdocco at the age of 58.[250] She initially came to care for her priest-son's uncertain health condition, but she also took on the role of a mother to the boys in the oratory, sharing in his mission and work.[251]

In 1851, Marianna, the elder sister of Mama Margaret, joined this service of maternal volunteers. After Mama Margaret's passing in 1856, the mother of Fr. Michael Rua, along with other mothers, carried on this tradition of maternal care and service. However, this practice of maternal volunteers gradually faded as the Salesian congregation began to grow and develop.[252]

Despite this evolution, it remains evident that the charism of Don Bosco is rooted in an educative and pastoral community that fosters a family atmosphere—an

[248] *Ibid.*, 203.

[249] *Ibid.*, 319.

[250] *Ibid.*, 296-299.

[251] DBHS, vol. 2, 115.

[252] DBLW, 116-117.

approach significantly influenced by the example and dedication of these early maternal volunteers.[253]

8.2.3 The Needy Youth

The needy youth of that time were another significant group that influenced and gave direction to Don Bosco. The establishment of the Oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and Guardian Angel was Don Bosco's pastoral response to these youth, becoming the model and foundation of Salesian ministry.[254]

During that era, Don Bosco observed a large number of immigrants moving from the countryside to the city in search of jobs. Many of these young people faced desperate circumstances. Don Bosco described their situation as follows:

> Almost all of them are visitors who have been abandoned by their relatives in this city; or they have come here looking for work and failed to get it. Boys from Savoy, Switzerland, the Val d'Aosta, Biella, Novara, Lombardy are the ones who most frequently come to my activities.[255]

Undoubtedly, the plight of these needy youth inspired and directed Don Bosco's definitive vocational commitment.[256] These poor and abandoned young people were welcomed into Don Bosco's oratories, where the basic features included catechism lessons and recreational opportunities on Sundays and holy days.[257] As a result, a

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[253] Cf. C, 47. The educative community and lay people associated with our work: "We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of the Church and a revelation of God's plan for us.

In this community lay people associated with our work make a contribution all their own, because of their experience and pattern of life.

We welcome and encourage their collaboration, and we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the Salesian spirit and the practice of the preventive system.

We foster the spiritual growth of each of them, and to those who may be so inclined we suggest a closer sharing of our mission in the Salesian Family."

[254] DBHS, vol. 2, 163.

[255] MO, 233. At that time, many of the youth joining Don Bosco's oratory were grown men already: 18, 20, even 25 years old.

[256] DBLW, 114.

[257] *Ibid.*, 108.

unique festive oratory style was developed, characterized as a home, a church, a school, and a playground for young people.[258] By 1847, a shelter service was also offered in Valdocco to better support these youth.

The oratories received official recognition from the archdiocese, and on March 31, 1852, Archbishop Fransoni appointed Don Bosco as the Head Spiritual Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and the Superior of the Oratories of St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel.[259]

In the 1850s, another way Don Bosco responded to the needs of youth was through the creation of a boarding-school complex. According to the research of Fr. Lenti, there were about 100 boys in Don Bosco's boarding house in 1853. During this period, 65% of these boys were working apprentices, supported by workshops that had been installed within the complex, while the rest were students. By 1856, the number of boarders had risen to about 200, with 65% of them now students. A secondary course of studies began, and a complete secondary education program was introduced in 1859-1860.[260]

Beyond providing education and vocational training, Don Bosco also focused on forming good Christians and good citizens. He fostered priestly vocations and encouraged the formation of the Salesian Society by selecting excellent youth who demonstrated good conduct, goodwill, and intelligence—beautiful fruits of the

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[258] DBHS, vol. 2, 229-230. Gathering the truly poor and abandoned young people for the whole day on Sundays and holy days receiving religious education, and playing games was the significance of Don Bosco's festive oratory. Moreover, Don Bosco would visit these young people on weekdays keeping weeklong contact.

The traditional oratory was basically defined from attendance at Church and meeting in designated parish facilities. Usually the youth participating in this kind of oratory were the best in conduct and religious practice. Moreover, the role of play and the playground was very limited to this traditional oratory.

[259] DBLW, 111.

[260] DBHS, vol. 2, 168-169.

boarding-school complex.[261]

In the 1860s, there was a growing demand for schools in larger provincial cities and municipal towns due to increased immigration, while the number of seasonal workers declined because of the newly organized economic system. To address this need, Don Bosco organized three types of schools during this period: the junior seminary, the municipal Salesian school, and private Salesian schools.[262]

The founding of the Salesian Society was another key response to the needs of youth. This collaborative ministry, established within a religious congregation setting, ensured the continuation of Don Bosco's mission.[263] *The Regulations for the Festive Oratory of 1852-1854* provided the foundation for the Salesian Society, preserving the oratory's spirit in youth-focused pastoral ministry.[264] After years of preparation, the Salesian Society was officially founded on December 18, 1859, and received definitive approval as a congregation with simple vows on March 1, 1869. Its constitution, however, was only approved on April 3, 1874.[265]

These milestones laid the groundwork for Don Bosco to dedicate his own life and his congregation to serving poor and abandoned youth.

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[261] *Ibid.*, 170. Good Christians as well as good citizens was the aim of Don Bosco's education, we might say that this was affected by the nationalist revolution, and became a slogan avoiding any political troubles at that time. Eventually, it was bringing out to the best possible effect of the person's potentialities in view of the individual's functioning as "a mature Christian adult in society", which was Don Bosco's ultimate educative-pastoral purpose.

[262] The junior seminary, whether under diocesan ownership or operated as a private Salesian school in premises given to it, or acquired by, Don Bosco. The municipal Salesian school, was taken in by the request of a municipal town, to serve as local public school and operated on the basis of a legal agreement defining mutual rights and obligations. The private Salesian school was totally owned and operated by Salesians in the service of young people.

[263] DBHS, vol. 3, 319-322.

[264] *Ibid.*, 319-321. The Regulations for the festive Oratory of 1852-1854 served as a norm in the exercise of this part of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline for the fairly numerous priests and lay people who devote their labors to this ministry with love and concern.

These regulations were the initial forms of Don Bosco's preventive system, which included reason, religion, and loving kindness. Moreover, a family model was used in every Salesian house (oratory, hostel, school, etc.), which should function like a home. This was a home-family concept applying to the educational community in every Salesian house.

[265] DBLW, 163.

8.2.4 Pope Blessed Pius IX

Pope Blessed Pius IX (1792–1878) was another significant figure who inspired Don Bosco in the development of the Salesian Society. At that time, Don Bosco worked alongside his collaborators to serve needy youth under the Pope's guidance during the initial stages of the three oratories. These collaborators included both priests and lay faithful. However, as Don Bosco continued these services, he began to consider forming a group more closely connected to him.[266] Consequently, he started identifying young men from within the oratories who were most suitable to assist him. This marked the initial form of collaborative ministry, which later evolved into a religious congregation.[267]

Regarding this vision, Pope Blessed Pius IX granted private audiences to Don Bosco on March 9 and 21, 1858,[268] during which he provided feedback on Don Bosco's idea to lay the foundation of the Salesian Society. The Pope suggested two key principles. First, the members of the Society should take simple vows, serving as a bond and a guarantee of unity in spirit and mission. Second, although the group would function as a true religious congregation, the members' civil freedom and rights before the government should be safeguarded to avoid negative consequences from the Rattazzi Bill.[269]

Moreover, Pope Blessed Pius IX advised and directed Don Bosco, in both 1858[270] and 1867[271] to document his extraordinary experiences as a source of

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[266] *Ibid.*, 144-148.

[267] DBHS, vol. 3, 320-321.

[268] BM, vol. 5, 558-562, 575-579.

[269] DBHS, vol. 3, 330. Minister of the Interior Urbano Rattazzi gave similar suggestions to Don Bosco, Fr. Lenti summarized: "The illumination received from Rattazzi's words had to do with the viability of a religious association that would have the same legal basis as a secular association and free citizens banded together for a lawful purpose. But, as stated above, Don Bosco hoped that this religious association would also qualify as a religious congregation in the eyes of the Church."

[270] BM, vol. 5, 577.

encouragement and as a guideline for his spiritual sons. As a result, Don Bosco's autobiography became another key foundation and guiding framework for the Salesian Society, stemming directly from this papal instruction.

8.2.5 The Virtue of Personal Development

Don Bosco's priestly ministry to needy youth demonstrated a profound sense of care and productivity. Although distinct from traditional parental generativity, it reflected his deep concern for guiding the next generation, albeit distinguishable from parental generativity. His establishment of oratories, schools, and the Salesian Society reflected a remarkable sense of productivity and creativity in the educative-pastoral approach of the Saint. This aligns closely with Erikson's assertion that the challenge of generativity can be summarized as "primarily the concern with establishing and guiding the next generation."[272]

In the light of pastoral charity, nurturing the youth to become mature and faithful individuals represents the fulfillment of generativity within the context of religious life. Through this, a close and organic ecclesial community is formed to aid in the spiritual and moral formation of young believers.[273]

It is evident that Don Bosco's deep care for poor and abandoned youth found expression in his ministry, addressing the social service gaps of his time. For instance, during the challenging period from 1844 to 1846, when the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was exiled and relocated multiple times, Don Bosco might have faced the potential risk of stagnation, a psychosocial crisis associated with adulthood.[274] However, these challenges were ultimately resolved through Divine providence and

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[271] *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 256.

[272] Erikson, *A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980*, 607.

[273] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 288.

[274] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 267.

Don Bosco's unwavering faith. Consequently, the impact of this psychosocial crisis on Don Bosco was minimal.

8.3 The Significant Elements of Don Bosco's Adulthood Stage

Applying Don Bosco's charism at a group level was one of the most influential elements of his adulthood. This concept arose from Don Bosco's pastoral experience, which involved spiritual reflection on daily life as a means to evaluate and enhance his youth pastoral ministry, as mentioned above. His group-oriented ministry was directly tied to the needs and appeals of disadvantaged young people.

The formation of an educative-pastoral community is another significant aspect of Don Bosco's legacy. This community included various members, such as the Salesians, Salesian Sisters,[275] Salesian Cooperators, and others.[276] It followed the model of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, thereby continuing Don Bosco's charism.[277] In essence, the Salesian Society stands at the heart of this educative-pastoral community, working collaboratively with members of the broader Salesian family.

Importantly, Don Bosco responded to the Divine will in addressing the needs of marginalized youth; however, his response was not limited to an individual approach but also encompassed group and communal efforts. Through this, Don Bosco and his collaborators expressed the love of Jesus Christ for young people in need.

This collective appeal to address youth needs became a medium for guidance and motivation, which inspired and animated Don Bosco's faith as well as that of his followers. The Salesian charism also embraced a family model, exemplified by the

[275] The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Sisters, was established on 5 August 1872 by Don Bosco and St. Mary Mazzarello.

[276] The Salesian Cooperators Association is for the lay faithful, which was established by Don Bosco in 1876.

[277] DBHS, vol. 3, 321.

maternal role played by Mama Margaret in the oratory. Furthermore, group discernment was essential in identifying and addressing the needs of young people. For example, the guidance and mentorship of Fr. Borel played a key role in inspiring Don Bosco to fully embrace his vocation. Thus, a clear connection emerges between the needs of disadvantaged youth and the group discernment that applied Don Bosco's charism.[278]

As a result, the educative-pastoral community—fostered with a family atmosphere and a heightened awareness of youth needs under Divine guidance—became the key instrument for continuing St. John Bosco's charism. This community pursued and fulfilled the Divine will by responding to the needs of poor and abandoned youth, who, in turn, served as a medium of guidance and motivation in the context of Jesus Christ's love.

[278] Cf. C, 19. Initiative and flexibility: "The Salesian is called to be a realist and to be attentive to the signs of the times, convinced that the Lord also manifests His Will through the demands of time and place.

Hence his spirit of imitative and apostolic creativity: 'In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God, I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness'.

Timely response to these needs requires him to keep abreast of new trends and meet them with the well-balanced creativity of the Founder; periodically he evaluates his work."

9. Don Bosco's Elderhood Stage (60-73 years old)[279]

At this stage, there was a significant expansion and consolidation of the Salesian Society in France, Italy, Spain, and South America.[280] By 1888, the Salesian Society comprised 58 houses, 773 professed members, and 276 novices.[281]

Although Don Bosco was in his elderly years, the young congregation was thriving and expanding beyond Europe. Naturally, this growth was one of his main concerns. At the same time, he sought to teach and share his life experiences in youth pastoral work with his spiritual sons. This reflects a sense of ego integrity, as described by Erikson.[282]

This analysis aims to examine how Don Bosco inspired and guided the Salesians to carry forward his spirit and charism during this stage of his life.

9.1 The Social Context of Don Bosco's Elderhood Stage

The Italian emigration in the 19th century and the First Ecumenical Vatican Council were two important social factors that drove the expansion of the Salesian Society. Between 1876 and 1914, 14 million Italians emigrated to South and North America, Oceania, and parts of Africa. For example, in 1876 alone, about 100,000 Italians emigrated, primarily to the Americas. This massive emigration resulted from

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[279] Don Bosco passed away on 31 January 1888.

[280] DBHS, vol. 5, 359-381. The first Salesian missionary group was sent to South America on 11 November 1875.

Oratory of St. Pierre in Nice was the first Salesian house in Southern France inaugurated on 12 March 1877.

St. Gabriel Orphanage in Lille was taken possession of by Don Bosco on 29 January 1884, which was the first Salesian house in Northern France.

Fr. Francis Dalmazzo was appointed as the Procurator General of the Salesian Society in Rome in 1880, and the Basilica of Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome was dedicated on 14 May 1888.

A hospice-school was established in Utrera in 1885, using the former Carmelite monastery, which was the first Salesian house in Southern Spain.

A vocational school was developed in Sarria on 15 February 1884, which was the first Salesian house in Northeastern Spain.

[281] *Ibid.*, 382.

[282] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 268-269.

the political, economic, and social upheavals in Italy during this period. The migrants were largely peasants from mountainous regions or rural natives, similar to the earlier mass immigration in Piedmont during the 1830s and 1840s. During that earlier time, rural communities moved to cities in response to industrial expansion, seeking better employment opportunities.[283] The Salesian missionary movement can be closely connected to this broader emigration trend, as it aimed to address the spiritual and educational needs of these migrating populations.

The First Ecumenical Vatican Council was another substantial social factor influencing the future development of the Salesian Society. Although the Council itself did not focus explicitly on the Church's missionary mission, many missionary bishops were among its participants, and their presence fostered a heightened sense of missionary spirit. These bishops took the opportunity to invite religious congregations to send confreres to their dioceses to support their missions and communities.[284]

For example, when Don Bosco was in Rome from January 24 to February 22, 1869, he met with several bishops and listened to their requests for help.[285] These included Bishop Dominic Barbero of Hyderabad in India, Bishop Alemany of San Francisco, and others.[286] The Council thereby became an ecclesiastical and social event that further promoted the Salesian missionary movement.

9.2 The Significant Persons and the Virtue of Personal Development at this Stage

In his later years, Don Bosco was profoundly concerned about the spiritual and institutional future of the Salesian congregation he founded. This concern became one of his leading preoccupations as he aged. In alignment with the directive of Pope

[283] DBHS, vol. 6, 45-46.

[284] DBLW, 181.

[285] DBHS, vol. 6, 94-96.

[286] DBLW, 181.

Blessed Pius IX in 1867, Don Bosco devoted significant time during the 1870s and 1880s to writing and revising his autobiography. He saw this effort as a way to impart his paternal care to his spiritual sons,[287] ensuring that his extensive experience in youth pastoral work would serve as an enduring guide for the congregation.

In this section, three key documents are analyzed: (1) the 20 recommendations Don Bosco gave to the first Salesian missionary group on November 11, 1875; (2) a letter from Rome dated May 10, 1884; and (3) Don Bosco's "Spiritual Testament." These documents were included in the 1984 Constitutions and Regulations of the Salesian Society, underscoring their significance as cherished teachings for Salesians.

9.2.1 The 20 Recommendations of Don Bosco Given to the First Salesian Missionary Group[288]

The departure of the first Salesian missionary group to Argentina in 1875 marked a significant milestone in the history of the Salesian Society, symbolizing its initial expansion beyond the borders of Europe. Fr. John Cagliero[289] along with nine companions, was entrusted with this pioneering mission. The departure ceremony was held at the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin on November 11, 1875, following their visit to Rome to obtain two critical documents: (1) a letter of presentation for Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires from Cardinal Antonelli, the Secretary of State in the Vatican, and (2) a decree from Cardinal Franchi, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which declared that the group had an apostolic mission. Additionally, the missionaries received the blessing of Pope

[287] MO, 5.

[288] DBHS, vol. 6, 69-75. The members of the first Salesian missionary group: Fr. John Cagliero, Fr. Joseph Fagnano, Fr. Dominic Tomatis, Fr. Valentione Cassini, Fr. John Baptist Baccino, Fr. James Allavena, Br. Bartholomew Scavini, Br. (Novice) Batholomew Molinari, Br. (Novice) Vincent Gioia, Br. Stephen Belmonte.

[289] Fr. John Cagliero was appointed as a leader of the first Salesian Missionary group and granted full authority to negotiate and conclude any business with either civil or ecclesiastical authorities.

Blessed Pius IX before departing from Genoa for Buenos Aires on November 14, 1875.

At the departure ceremony, Don Bosco presented each missionary with a small leaflet containing 20 key recommendations. These recommendations served as a fatherly guide and outlined important principles related to their conduct, religious life, pastoral mission, and relationships with others. The main points included: First, Don Bosco emphasized the charism of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, urging the missionaries to prioritize their pastoral approaches. This involved seeking souls, serving abandoned and poor youth, promoting frequent Confession and Communion, and fostering Marian devotion. Second, maintaining good conduct was emphasized as essential for sustaining their missionary vocation. Third, Don Bosco advised fostering positive relationships with local authorities and religious figures. Speaking well of them would not only support their missionary work but also enhance the reputation of the Salesian Society. Last, Don Bosco encouraged the missionaries to remain faithful to the practices of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, assuring them that their dedication would be greatly rewarded in Heaven.[290]

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[290] BM, vol. 11, 363-365. Below are the 20 recommendations to the first Salesian Missionary group by Don Bosco:

1. Seek souls and not money, honors, or dignities.
2. Be kind and most courteous towards all, but shun conversations and familiarity with people of the other sex or with people of questionable conduct.
3. Do not go visiting except for motives of charity or necessity.
4. Never accept invitations to dinner except for very serious reasons. In these cases, arrange to go with another confrere.
5. Take special care of the sick, the children, the aged, and the poor, and you will gain the blessing of God and the goodwill of people.
6. Show respect towards all in authority, whether civic, religious, municipal, or state.
7. On meeting a person in authority, take care to greet him with respect.
8. Do the same towards priests and religious.
9. Shun idleness and disputes. Practice great moderation in eating and drinking and sleeping.
10. Love, reverence and respect other religious orders, and always speak well of them. This is the way of winning the esteem of all and of promoting the good of the Congregation.
11. Take care of your health. Work, but only as much as your strength allows.
12. Let the world know that you are poor in clothing, food, and dwelling, and you will be rich in the sight of God and will conquer people's hearts.
13. Love one another, advise one another, correct one another, and never be carried away by

These heartfelt recommendations encapsulated Don Bosco's wisdom, life experiences, and Salesian charism. They were designed to provide guidance and inspiration for the first Salesian missionaries, helping them to preserve the spirit of the congregation and carry forward its mission with unwavering faith and commitment.

9.2.2 A Letter from Rome on 10 May 1884[291]

Between 1884 and 1885, as highlighted in Fr. Lenti's research, Don Bosco was deeply troubled by the condition of the Oratory. He observed a decline in the traditional educative style, accompanied by a deterioration in the boys' moral and spiritual well-being. In response, several meetings of the Superior Chapter were convened to explore solutions for improving the moral and spiritual environment of the student community. These challenges were likely a consequence of the rapid expansion of the Salesian Society. Initially, Don Bosco and his council employed a hands-on, direct approach to overseeing oratories, communities, and groups. However, as the ministry grew, this management style became ineffective, resulting in issues such as weakened discipline, lack of supervision, insufficient leadership, and overall disunity and disorganization.[292]

Though these matters are not explored in depth in this section, Don Bosco's

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envy or rancor. Rather, let the good of one be the good of all, and let the pains and sufferings of one be regarded as the pains and sufferings of all, and let each one strives to remove or at least to mitigate them.

14. Observe your rules and never neglect the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.
15. Every morning commend to God the occupations of the day, especially confessions, classes, catechism, and sermons.
16. Constantly recommend devotion to Mary Help of Christians and to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.
17. Recommend to the boys frequent confession and Communion.
18. In order to foster vocations to the priesthood, you should recommend: (1) Love of chastity; (2) horror of the opposite vice; (3) avoidance of bad companions; (4) frequent Communion; (5) and treat the boys with special charity, affability, and kindness.
19. Hear both sides before judging on reports and matters in dispute.
20. In your labors and sufferings do not forget that a great reward is prepared for us in Heaven. Amen.

[291] BM, vol. 17, 85-94.

[292] DBHS, vol. 7, 192-196.

profound concern for the Oratory and his deep desire to guide his spiritual sons are unmistakable. This sentiment is captured at the close of his 1884 letter, where he wrote: "I, therefore, am most anxious to leave you, my priests, clerics and most beloved children, on the road of God on which our Lord Himself wishes you to walk."[293]

Fr. Eugenio Ceria[294] observed that the key themes of this letter are rooted in Don Bosco's pedagogy and his focus on forming excellent Christians and honest citizens. Fr. Ceria also noted that goodwill and a spirit of sacrifice are indispensable qualities of a Salesian.[295] At the beginning of the letter, Don Bosco expressed his heartfelt wish for all who lived in the Salesian house or oratory: that they may be happy both in this life and in eternity. He urged his spiritual sons to learn to love what the boys loved so that, in turn, the boys would feel inspired to love and respect their superiors. For this to be accomplished, mutual love and trust, harmony, and endurance were essential, with love for Jesus Christ serving as the unifying force.[296]

Don Bosco further emphasized the special protection of Mary Help of Christians, proclaiming: "I declare to you before God that a boy who enters a Salesian house will be immediately taken under the special protection of the Most Holy Virgin."[297] With this assurance, students were encouraged to honor God and the Virgin Mary through their virtuous behavior, fostering a spirit of fraternity and mutual love, framed by the family spirit central to Salesian life. This spirit was deeply rooted in the understanding

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[293] BM, vol. 17, 94.

[294] Fr. Eugenio Ceria (1870-1957) was a Salesian priest, a distinguished scholar, author, and editor. He has given his great contribution to the studies of the life of St. John Bosco, St. Mary Mazzarello, Blessed Michael Rua and the other distinguished Salesians.

[295] BM, vol. 17, 94.

[296] *Ibid*., 89.

[297] *Ibid*., 93.

that they were children of Mary Help of Christians.[298]

In summary, Don Bosco envisioned the Salesian house as a community founded on love and sacrifice, fully embodying his teachings. Such a foundation would create a nurturing environment where the spiritual and moral development of students could thrive under the guidance and protection of Mary Help of Christians.

9.2.3 The Spiritual Testament of Don Bosco[299]

The teachings of Don Bosco, presented as his spiritual testament before his death, were addressed to his successor, the directors of all houses, and all his beloved sons in Jesus Christ. Fr. Eugenio Ceria noted that the founder did not follow a structured plan in composing this testament,[300] instead, he jotted down ideas in a small notebook whenever they came to mind.[301] Consequently, the thoughts in the testament appeared somewhat unconnected.[302]

This discussion focuses specifically on the section titled "The Future," rather than the entire testament. In this part, Don Bosco reminded his Salesians of three essential points.

First, Don Bosco emphasized that the congregation would have a bright future under the guidance of Divine Providence, provided that the rules were faithfully observed. However, he cautioned that the pious Society could be ruined by excessive comfort and ease.[303]

Second, Don Bosco reaffirmed that the primary mission of the congregation was

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[298] *Ibid*.

[299] *Ibid*., 230-250.

[300] *Ibid.*, 230.

[301] DBHS, vol. 7, 246. Don Bosco's "Spiritual Testament" was written at intervals between January-February 1884, and the end of 1886, with final additional notes between 8 April and 24 December 1887.

[302] BM, vol. 17, 230.

[303] *Ibid.*, 249-250.

to care for the welfare of natives and poor children, stressing the importance of helping those most in need.[304]

Third, Don Bosco highlighted that these missions should be carried out with determination, energy, and a spirit of sacrifice.[305]

In essence, Don Bosco underscored that serving poor and abandoned children was the core charism of the congregation. He earnestly wished for his spiritual sons to preserve this charism by continuing the mission of the Salesian Society with unwavering dedication.

9.2.4 The Virtue of Personal Development

There is no doubt that Don Bosco expended all his energy in teaching and demonstrating care and concern for the Salesians as his young congregation grew. During this time, his sense of ego integrity also became evident. Ego integrity, as described in Erikson's psychosocial theory, reflects an acceptance of one's life as meaningful and a recognition of the legacy one leaves behind for the future.[306] Don Bosco's enduring charism for the Salesian Society embodied this legacy. According to Erikson's framework, individuals with a strong sense of ego integrity approach death without fear, much like a healthy child embraces life without fear. Conversely, a lack of ego integrity in old age can lead to despair—a psychosocial crisis characterized by the fear of death and the regret that life feels too short to explore new paths toward fulfillment and integrity.[307] This despair manifests in sentiments such as: "the time is now short, too short for an attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to

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[304] *Ibid.*

[305] *Ibid.*, 250.

[306] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 288.

[307] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 268-269.

integrity."[308]

For Don Bosco, the conflict with Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi over the establishment and development of the Salesian Society was a significant source of stress, consuming much of his energy.[309] This tension might have led him to experience a sense of despair if he had not relied on his deep trust in God.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco remained profoundly anchored in his faith, which fortified his sense of ego integrity. His unwavering commitment to the mission of the Salesian Society, under divine guidance and Providence, was inseparably linked to the spiritual formation of his spiritual sons and the preservation of the Salesian charism. This profound sense of integrity not only brought Don Bosco peace in his later years but also influenced his interactions with his spiritual sons and the boys in the oratory. He inspired them to embark on their own journeys toward personal and communal integration, animated by love for God and a commitment to serving others.[310]

Erikson's theory provides valuable insight into the psychological experiences of elderly individuals, offering a framework to understand the challenges Don Bosco likely encountered in his later years. However, while Erikson's model addresses ego integrity and despair, it does not adequately capture Don Bosco's spiritual dimension—the deep yearning he had for the salvation of his Salesians and the boys in his oratories. For Don Bosco, this eternal perspective transcended any secular

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[308] *Ibid.*, 269.

[309] DBHS, vol. 4, 211-214. Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi was appointed as the archbishop of Turin in 1871-1883. Regarding the control of the Salesian Society, the archbishop wanted the congregation to be under his authority. However, Don Bosco wanted a free hand, independence from local ordinaries, and to be subjected to papal control only. Therefore, there were many conflicts between Archbishop Gastaldi and Don Bosco.

Although these kind of conflicts were a significant obstacle for Don Bosco's ministry, this is not discussed in this book because its main focus is trying to study the correlation between Don Bosco's faith-response to God (vocation) and social factors nurturing his spiritual sons and the charism of the Salesian Society.

[310] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 288.

theoretical framework, underscoring the Divine mission and the enduring legacy he left for future generations.

9.3 The Significant Elements of Don Bosco's Elderhood Stage

In Don Bosco's later years, he emphasized three significant elements concerning his spiritual sons and the Salesian Society: collective discernment, the delegation-supervision model, and youth pastoral ministry imbued with a spirit of sacrifice. These elements reflected his teachings and his faith-filled response to God in sustaining the congregation's charismatic mission.

First, in his letter from Rome on May 10, 1884, Don Bosco expressed his deep worries and concerns regarding the direction and spirit of his beloved congregation. During this stage, he became a source of guidance and motivation, inspiring his sons to preserve the Salesian charism and fulfill the Divine will by serving needy youth and expressing Christ's love to them.

To address these concerns, meetings of the Superior Chapter were convened, and a committee was established to safeguard good morals within the Salesian community.[311] This marked the beginning of a collective discernment process under Divine guidance. This approach did not merely involve following Don Bosco's instructions but also entailed evaluating the prevailing circumstances and formulating an educative-pastoral strategy to carry forward the congregation's charism. This effort evolved into the early forms and functions of the Salesian Society's General Council and General Chapter.[312]

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[311] DBHS, vol. 7, 201.

[312] Cf. C, 130. The general council: "The general council cooperates with the Rector Major in animating and governing the Congregation.

It is the task of the council to identify and study the problems which concern the common welfare of the Society, to promote fraternal union among the different provinces, and to develop an ever more efficient organization for the fulfillment of the Salesian mission in the world."

Cf. C, 146. The general chapter: "The general chapter is the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity. It is the fraternal meeting in which Salesians carry out a communal reflection to keep

In this process of collective discernment, confreres became instruments of guidance and collaboration, responding together to God's will. Their discernment reflected and expressed Christ's love for youth and the world, making collective decision-making a hallmark of the Salesian pastoral mission.

Second, the delegation-supervision model was another crucial element developed by Don Bosco. During the commissioning of the first Salesian missionary group, the 20 recommendations provided by Don Bosco were strictly adhered to by the missionaries. Fr. Cagliero, delegated as their leader with full authority, exemplified the delegation model. He maintained close communication with Don Bosco through letters, ensuring that missions were aligned with the congregation's objectives.[313]

For instance, in a circular from October 1876, Don Bosco gave instructions based on missionary reports, outlining a strategic approach to Salesian missionary work: "opening high schools in cities bordering Indian lands, the taking in of savage boys, and thereby to approach the adults through ministering to their children."[314] This vision, developed under Divine inspiration, highlights the centrality of the delegation-supervision model in Salesian missionary success.

This model later became a cornerstone for coordinating different levels of authority within the congregation, preserving unity, and sustaining the Salesian charism.[315] By delegating authority and fostering collaboration, Don Bosco ensured

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themselves faithful to the Gospel and to their Founder's charism, and sensitive to the needs of time and place.

Through the general chapter the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God's will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service."

[313] DBLW, 184-189.

[314] *Ibid.*, 189.

[315] Cf. C, 124. Subsidiarity and decentralization: "Authority of any kind and at every level leaves to the initiative of lower levels and of individuals whatever can be decided and done by them, according to their respective competence. In this way the worth of individuals and communities is recognized, and more real involvement is encouraged.

that his spiritual sons could evangelize effectively in diverse settings. Moreover, this model extended to spiritual accompaniment, emphasizing the importance of guiding the young and confreres alike toward personal and spiritual fulfillment within a Christocentric vision.[316]

Third, Don Bosco firmly asserted in his Spiritual Testament that serving poor and abandoned youth with a spirit of sacrifice was central to the mission of the Salesian Society. He identified this spirit of sacrifice as the driving force behind achieving the congregation's mission for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

This pastoral spirit emphasized integrating personal spirituality with communal dedication to the Salesian charism. It called for Salesians to develop intimacy with God and imbue their ministry with a spirit of profound self-giving. For Don Bosco, this was not simply a practical approach but also a deeply spiritual one, rooted in the motivation to carry out God's will. From this perspective, serving youth sacrificially became essential to youth pastoral ministry and religious life,[317] binding individual Salesians to the collective mission of the congregation.

In his old age, Don Bosco's profound concern for his spiritual sons and the young congregation inspired him to refine and promote these three significant elements:

The principle of subsidiarity implies decentralization which, while safeguarding unity, recognizes a proper autonomy and consequently a right distribution of powers between the different organs of government."

[316] Emmanuel Camilleri, "Characteristic Traits of the Spiritual Accompaniment of the Young as an Integral Part of the Educational System of Don Bosco Part 1," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 17, no. 1 (June 2016): 86–128, 86 & 96.

[317] Cf. C, 18. Work and temperance: "Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish, whereas the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will instead bring about its death.

The Salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

Temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered.

He does not look for unusual penances but accept the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it."

collective discernment, the delegation-supervision model, and youth pastoral ministry with a spirit of sacrifice. Together, these teachings served as a testament to his wisdom and unwavering faith. They ensured the sustenance of the congregation's charism and marked Don Bosco's enduring response to God's will as a loving father and spiritual guide for his sons and the youth.

10. Conclusion

10.1 Spiritual Accompaniment

The primary objective of this book is to present the life and works of Don Bosco within the framework of Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory. This approach explores Don Bosco's faith-filled response to God during the different stages of his life, as influenced by his vocation, followers, and social circumstances. In line with Pendergraft's insight on Erikson's theory—where people at different developmental stages need one another and should embrace an honest view of their aging process to achieve human and spiritual perfection,[318] we find harmony with Fr. Emmanuel Camilleri's perspective: "Spiritual accompaniment is essentially a dialogue between two persons of faith, that is, they both believe in the power of the Spirit of God who leads them to understand and act upon the will of God."[319] While Erikson emphasizes personal growth through interpersonal support, Fr. Camilleri expands this perspective to also include spiritual growth.[320]

Serving the poor and abandoned youth was clearly Don Bosco's charism. Inspired by God, this charism guided Don Bosco and his mission. It is from God that Don Bosco drew his sense of guidance and motivation. At the heart of this dynamic relationship between God's call and Don Bosco's faith-filled response lies Jesus

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[318] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 289.

[319] Camilleri, "Characteristic Traits of the Spiritual Accompaniment of the Young as an Integral Part of the Educational System of Don Bosco Part 1," 88. Fr. Emmanuel Camilleri is a Salesian scholar and was an adjunct professor of Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology, Berkeley, California, USA.

[320] See Morton T. Kelsey, *Christianity as Psychology: The Healing Power of the Christian Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 98. Morton Kelsey stated that psychology cannot provide meaning; it can only mediate meaning. This argument is in harmony with the view of Cardinal Carter, *Psychology and the Cross*, xii-xiv. Psychology offers to Christians the knowledge that they can be made aware of the totally unknown part of humans, and that permits us, consequently, to project upon this unknown territory the light of faith and supernatural prudence. The aim of psychology is to know humans better in order to develop their maturity, meanwhile, by faith or spirituality, the Christian life produces the completely virtuous human in order to admit that God is the Creator of all truth. This is the significance of the collaboration between psychology and spirituality for the sake of personal and spiritual growth.

Christ.[321]

Don Bosco's identity as the "Father and Teacher of Youth" was shaped by the religious upbringing from his mother and by the teaching and spiritual guidance of holy and exemplary priests. This title, first coined by Giovanni Cardinal Cagliero (an early Salesian) in 1922,[322] was officially proclaimed by Pope St. John Paul II in 1989,[323] and has become central to how Salesians honor their founder.

Central to Don Bosco's charism is the idea of forming an "educative-pastoral community" modeled after a family. Within this environment, group sanctification, intimacy with God, deep friendships among Salesians and the youth, and a spirit of total self-giving are fostered. This spirit resonates with Don Bosco's motto: *"Da Mihi Animas, Caetera Tolle."*[324] The ultimate aim of this community is to nurture faith in God. This objective creates a spirit of continual spiritual reflection, ensuring that youth pastoral ministry remains relevant to the needs of disadvantaged youth in varying times. This ministry is built upon collective discernment within a delegation-supervision model.

Pendergraft noted that Erikson's theory inspires Christian communities to

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[321] Camilleri, "Characteristic Traits of the Spiritual Accompaniment of the Young as an Integral Part of the Educational System of Don Bosco Part 1," 96.

[322] Egidio Viganò, "Saint John Bosco: '*Iuventutis Pater et Magister*,'" Salesians Don Bosco, accessed 20 October 2021, https://www.sdb.org/en/RM_Resources/Letters_AGC/Fr_Vigano/_SAINT_JOHN_BOSCO_IUVENTUTIS_P.

Giovanni Cagliero (11 January 1838 – 28 February 1926) was an Italian Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who served as Apostolic Delegate to Nicaragua from 1908 to 1915, and was elevated to the cardinalate in 1915. Cagliero was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti, and studied at its seminary and later at the University of Turin. He entered the Salesian Society in 1851. He received the clerical habit from St. John Bosco himself and was reputed to be his favorite pupil. Cagliero was also a classmate of St. Dominic Savio and Blessed Michael Rua.

[323] John Paul II, "Lettera a Don Egidio Viganò, Rettore Maggiore Della Società Salesiana Di San Giovanni Bosco (24 Gennaio 1989): Giovanni Paolo II."

[324] MB, vol. 5, 81. In 1854, after St. Dominic Savio saw the poster containing the motto, *Da Mihi Animas, Caetera Tolle,* in Don Bosco's room, he said: "Oh, I see! Here you're not concerned with money, but with souls. I hope you'll be concerned with mine too!"

collaboratively address psychosocial crises at different stages of life.[325] In spiritual accompaniment, Fr. Camilleri articulated that the essence of accompanying another lies in personal participation in their life's journey—walking together in faith.[326]

In the relationship between God's call and Don Bosco's response, guidance and motivation emerge as central themes within interpersonal interactions. These interactions, guided by the Spirit, enable a deeper understanding and implementation of God's will.[327] In this process, Jesus Christ plays a pivotal role, serving as the point of encounter that draws individuals closer to God.[328]

10.2 Don Bosco's Example in Salesian Spirituality

Don Bosco's example has shaped the spirituality of the Salesians. A dedicated heart to God and the Church, coupled with a spirit of sacrifice, forms the foundation of this spirituality. When facing personal or communal challenges, Salesians are inspired to embrace Divine Providence as a path to sanctification. This, in turn, allows them to become witnesses of God's grace to the Church and the world.

Fr. Camilleri describes this as a Christ-like transformation.[329] Guidance and motivation are integral to this transformation. Salesian spirituality also involves cultivating patience and confidence in God, following the example of their patron saint, Francis de Sales. Ultimately, every Salesian is encouraged to become a spiritual father figure for disadvantaged youth, helping to guide them toward becoming mature Christians and contributors to society.

Pendergraft suggested that spiritual formation ties closely to physical and

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[325] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 289.

[326] Camilleri, "Characteristic Traits of the Spiritual Accompaniment of the Young as an Integral Part of the Educational System of Don Bosco Part 1," 88.

[327] *Ibid*.

[328] *Ibid*., 96.

[329] *Ibid*., 101.

psychosocial development, with both being necessary for a healthy relationship with God. Although spiritual development is not limited to physical and psychosocial growth, the latter significantly affects an individual's ability to deepen their connection with God.[330]

This dual focus was evident in Don Bosco's wish to bring all young people to Jesus Christ. His lifelong mission was to aid the youth in establishing a personal and enduring friendship with the Lord, helping them strive for personal and spiritual perfection—a lifelong process nurtured through spiritual accompaniment.[331]

10.3 Don Bosco's Final Wish

In his Spiritual Testament, Don Bosco expressed his enduring love and hope for the Salesians: "If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future with the exact observance of our constitutions."[332] As is clear from his life and teachings, Don Bosco's ultimate wish was for every Salesian to become exemplary in their dedication to their mission. His legacy endures as a testament of faith, sacrifice, and love for God and the youth entrusted to his care.

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[330] Pendergraft, "Erik Erikson and the Church: Corporate Worship That Sustains through Crises," 289.

[331] Camilleri, "Characteristic Traits of the Spiritual Accompaniment of the Young as an Integral Part of the Educational System of Don Bosco Part 1," 99.

[332] BM, vol. 17, 232.

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ISBN 978-99981-60-68-2